

A MIRACLE AFRICAN MISSIONS

By JOHN BELL





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**A MIRACLE OF MODERN
MISSIONS**





MATULA.

A Miracle of African Missions

The Story of Matula, a Congo Convert

BY

JOHN BELL

Baptist Missionary, Wathen, Congo

With Seven Full-page Illustrations



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY THE

SECRETARY OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY
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ALFRED SAKER, one of the Apostles of Africa, only a short while before his death, wrote: 'To the Christian missionary there is no joy so deep, and no inspiration so fruitful, as that which springs from witnessing the daily development of Divine grace in the hearts and lives of the peoples amongst whom he is called to labour. These "miracles of missions," "old things passing away, all things becoming new," I have had the deep joy of constantly witnessing amongst the dark and degraded peoples of Cameroons and Victoria, and this experience has often been my strength and stay, assuring me of the never-failing truth of the Divine promise, "My word shall not return to Me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."'

Introductory Note

The story of Matula, as told in the following pages by Mr. Bell, of Wathen Station, on the Lower Congo River, is surely another and striking example of the marvellous power of the Gospel of the Grace of God to convert and renew the most degraded and ignorant, and a luminous proof that that Gospel is the 'power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.' There are surely few records in the annals of the modern missionary enterprise more heroic, touching, and inspiring than that of the Congo Mission. The story of the success of missionary work amongst the degraded cannibal peoples of the vast Congo regions, extending over less than twenty-four years, reads almost like a romance, and surely constitutes a powerful and stimulating plea for largely extended efforts to take the 'Lamp of Life' into the dark recesses of the vast and as yet unexplored tracts of Central Africa.

The record of Matula's unswerving faithfulness to his Saviour under the most bitter and cruel persecution, his calm trustfulness in God in the prospect of immediate death at the hands of his powerful enemies, his unbroken assurance of the overruling Providence of his Father in heaven, and the utter absence of anything like fear in the presence of the spite, treachery, and malice

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of his persecutors, cannot but call forth devout thankfulness that the power of Divine grace was so strikingly manifested, and that to-day the effects resulting from his noble testimony are so manifestly seen in the changes that have come over his native town of Mongo, from which he was driven out by his enemies, but where a house of prayer has since been erected, the ruling chief Lunenga been baptized, and between sixty and seventy children in regular school attendance, taught by a native Christian teacher.

In very few fields of missionary toil have such widely extended evangelistic efforts been put forth by the native converts themselves as in connection with the Congo Mission. The native Christians from the first have adopted as a cardinal principle of Church membership that *every member* should personally engage in some definite Christian service. At Wathen Station 15 native Christian evangelists are wholly supported by the contributions of the Native Church, 44 out-stations are visited by native Christian workers, 1507 day scholars, and 807 Sunday scholars, are in attendance in the schools, and there are 1512 members of the Wathen Temperance Society, all expenses in connection with native evangelistic

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and school work being met by the native Christians themselves.

Mr. Bell's sketch of Matula, so sympathetically written, cannot fail to deepen and extend missionary enthusiasm, and, it is hoped, lead many young men to consecrate their lives to the blessed enterprise of winning Africa for Christ.

ALFRED HENRY BAYNES.

PREFACE

TO the average reader it may seem as though I had become too enthusiastic over the life of a simple Congo native. My justification is that we ought to appreciate truth, sincerity, and honesty wherever they may be found, remembering that 'God has made of one every nation, . . . and we are all His offspring.'

The African, I know, has been despised for his cringing, crafty, and cruel habits, and in the main rightly so ; but when amid such surroundings we find a true African gentleman, who is despised by his fellows for his truth, his sincerity, and his gentleness, and we know he is but a type of many others, in all fairness we ought to recognize him, thank God, and take courage.

The story of Matula's marvellous escape has been widely told in many parts of England, Ireland, and America by the Rev. R. H. C. Graham, of San Salvador, when

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home on furlough in 1898 and 1899, and on many occasions he was requested to publish it in pamphlet form. He hoped, however, it would find a place in Mr. Bentley's *Pioneering on the Congo*, which was then being written. But it turned out that Mr. Bentley could not find space to use it.

For myself, ever since the escape of Matula, when he returned to Ngombe (Wathen), I intended to write the story of his life as soon as a favourable opportunity presented itself. Soon after, however, I went home on furlough, and on my return other matters occupied me, so that I had almost forgotten my intention. But in 1901 I met Matula on his way to the station; I was much struck by his frail appearance (it was feared he had sleep-sickness), and I feared he would not live long, and thus his story would die with him. I at once made an appointment with him, and on the following morning and succeeding days his wife and he came, and from them I gathered the main facts of his life.

On acquainting Mr. Graham with my intention, he very kindly encouraged me to proceed and 'succeed,' and also sent the full account of Matula's trial, of which he himself was a witness. Thus my best thanks are due to him.

Preface

I feel sure the many who heard part of Matula's story from Mr. Graham and myself while on deputation work, will welcome this short yet fairly complete account of his life.

This little book is dedicated to all those who have even in the smallest way shared, or are sharing, in the work of spreading the Gospel in dark Congo land.

J. B.

WATHEN, LOWER CONGO.



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A MIRACLE OF MODERN MISSIONS

CHAPTER I

WITHOUT HOPE

PRIOR to the year 1871 inland Congo was unknown, and thought to be unknowable. The difficulties of penetration were so great they appeared insurmountable. Attempts had been made and failed, and it was feared for generations yet that inland country must remain a blank. Thank God, however, the dawn at last came when the intrepid Stanley succeeded in crossing the Dark Continent from Zanzibar to the West Coast *viâ* the mighty River Congo. But this marvellous journey could only reveal some of the physical characteristics of the country through which it passed and the barbarous character of its sturdy, swarthy inhabitants. The real history still remains a mystery; and a mystery for the great part is it destined to remain.

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Certain general facts, however, may be gleaned denoting ever a downward tendency in the character of its people and an almost entire stagnation of the brain. The purity of the language, the oneness in construction of the different dialects all over Congo, and the possession of a name for God which is almost identical, denote a higher common origin. The hut built, the spear turned, the hoe forged and the ground scraped in much the same way from time immemorial, denote a thoughtful, active ancestry, but an imitative yet unproductive progeny.

Action may prompt thought just as much as thought prompts action. The mind which first rejected and then chose the baser things of passion is degraded as it looks upon the acts of that passionate impulse, and thus gradually it becomes almost impossible to think of the pure, much less to do it. Thus man, as we read, was given up to 'vile passions.' He considered only the works of himself, and not the created things of God. When, where, and how these Congo peoples drifted from the light that once was theirs into the dense darkness in which we find them, who can tell? Yet of one thing we may be sure; the darkness stole over them as they persistently 'refused to have God in their knowledge.'

In this state we find them to-day, having a name for God, yet terribly superstitious lest any one should say anything of Him.

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In the main they will not hear, and any one who speaks of Him is a sorcerer. It is, then, worse than useless and unprofitable to look for universal progressiveness amongst such a people. Yet even among such there may be found one here and another there utterly different to his surroundings in thought and action, and for whom it is impossible to account by the natural law of progression. Whatever he is, he is not a product of his age. He stands in it, yet rises above it. For him we are compelled to accept what ought to be a truism, 'That in the darkest places and amongst the most degraded peoples God has never left Himself without a witness.'

And yet it is not necessary to that man that he should know of whom he is witnessing, or of what. Indeed, he may be a riddle unto himself. He mingles with the crowd viewing sights of horror which cause his whole nature to revolt, while they dance around in ecstasy. They delight in murder, his soul loathes it. The people wonder at his reticence, but none wonders more than himself. Sometimes he may, indeed, join in their wild heathen orgies, yet he is not happy. He fears to reveal his feelings, he knows they will only be misinterpreted.

The people will say he is a witch. They are not happy with him, they know not why. He has not light enough to walk, and he knows not where to grope for more. Surely

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there have been many such souls who have lived and died in this dark, dark land of Congo, through all the past untold ages. Theirs has been a restraining influence, but a restraint almost too light to be felt. Such an one, methinks, is Matula, about whom I have undertaken to write. His story comes to light because the light of the Gospel has come. But for the Christian missionary he would have lived and died hated by his fellows and misunderstood by his friends, on account of his gentle, unassuming nature—a striking contrast to his surroundings.

Much of what may appear overdrawn or incredible to my readers may be made clear, if they will but remember the great simplicity, or perhaps better, the great credulity, of the ordinary Congo native. He is a man who dreams, and believes much in his dreams. He firmly agrees with Tennyson when he says, 'Dreams are true while they last;' but he adds a rider, 'and we have to avenge our dreams.'

I should think it is not too much to say that many a man has been murdered in Congo land because his enemy saw him do an evil deed in his dream. To him it is real. Then it must be remembered the people are steeped in, and surrounded by, the grossest superstition. To them the rustle of a leaf may be moved by a spirit. Anything which is contrary to custom is

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witchcraft. Any one showing a special aptitude for a handicraft, or extraordinarily remarkable in trade, has the aid of a spirit. He ought to be killed, or else he will do a great deal of harm by-and-by.

They are fast believers in fate, and seem helpless to avert any threatened calamity. A man charged with witchcraft firmly believes in it, and is quite willing to be tested, believing he will be proved innocent. If he stands the test, he is confirmed in his belief; if not, the bystanders are convinced, and the witch has paid the penalty. It is thought that a man cannot bewitch any of a strange tribe; so when a man is ill or dies, the witch is sought amongst his own people; all sickness, disease, and death being ascribed to sorcery.

In hunting or fighting it is believed that nothing will be killed unless the aid of the hunting or fighting fetish has been sought. Even in war, when a man is killed it is believed that, while by the aid of the fetish the man was hit, he need not have been killed, had not one of his own people bewitched him. In this way the people are overruled in almost every affair in life—on the one hand by fetishism, and on the other by witchcraft. These two may at times oppose one another, as in the case of an uncured disease where sorcery claims the patient, or they may assist each other, as in the case of war, as we have seen.

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It is also necessary to remember that the people have very wide relationships, and all are considered brothers and sisters who may be only members of one clan, or sometimes even natives of the same town or country. All the brothers and sisters of the mother are not called uncles and aunts, but mothers, and all the brothers and sisters of the father are called fathers. Mother and father is a very wide term, and it is sometimes almost impossible, even by the closest scrutiny, to find out the real father and mother. Thus the children have mothers many and fathers many.

This, however, is not a book to discuss the customs, habits, and beliefs of the people of Congo. I refer to them only in so far as they throw light on Matula's story. My simple endeavour is to portray as best I can the life of one of our most simple-hearted and devoted native Christians. I ask, therefore, that my readers may read it with the firm conviction of its truthfulness, and with thanksgiving to God, who so marvellously led Matula and protected him in his darkest hours of distress and danger.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH OF MATULA

THE weary, weary hours of that long dreary night were slowly dragging their lagging moments over the land of Congo: when that long night began none could tell. At length the darkest and blackest hour of all had come. Soon after there arose a cry from the coast, going inland but a little: 'The dawn has come! The dawn has come!' It was the advent of the emissaries from Rome to propagate Christianity. But, alas! their coming and going was as the flash of lightning out of the lowering thunder-cloud.

The dawn was not yet. 'Twas only sleepers turning in the night who had mistaken it. The flash revealed some of the terrible horrors and distress of the night, but it left the people weltering in deeper darkness still. And that darkest hour was destined to roll on for almost two hundred years more. Towards its close the people had reached the lowest state one would think it possible for man to reach, and yet

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remain man. Law and order were but a name. Theft, murder, rapine, and the worst vices were fast changing to virtues. Might was Right. Strong slaves sold their weak masters. The lone man on the highway was captured, carried and sold by bands of marauding traders. The would-be potentate peopled his town with slaves captured far and wide. There was no redress, for there were none able to claim it. These self-same slaves would buy and sell one another on the slightest pretext. Authority there was none.

And yet, amidst all this chaos and confusion, the people carried on—but in a most meagre way—the few arts which had been handed down to them through the long generations. Blacksmithing and pottery work seem to have been the principal of them. Surely Longfellow was right when he wrote—

‘For since the birth of time, throughout all ages and nations,

Has the craft of the smith been held in repute by the people.’

Other trades, such as tailoring and rude carpentry, were no doubt largely influenced by the presence of the white man on the coast, who settled there some hundreds of years ago. The articles of the white man were handed into the heart of the country from middleman to middleman. The great

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imitative faculty of the people enabled them to make rude copies of what they saw.

'Tis true they had not the means of fashioning guns, but these they bought at enormous prices—of course, the further inland the less were they seen—and made bullets and slugs for warfare and hunting. Many smiths made good trade in these things. Iron and its use were very well known to the people, though there is no evidence of any real mines which they worked for the purpose. It is evident that when a blacksmith worked out all the ore there was to be had on the surface of any place, he would move on to another, rich with this most useful mineral.

About twenty years or so before the advent of Comber and Hartland at Mbanza Makuta (in 1880), there lived in a town near by a man named Nimu and his four brethren, who knew the art of smithing. They were rich, and had a number of slaves. They supplied the country-side with bullets and slugs for their guns. As they had to travel further and further for the iron ore, they determined to build on a very good site for their trade. This they did, and called the name of their town Mongo.

The eldest brother, Nimu, became chief, and a most autocratic one he was. It is said of him he was afraid of a son being born to any of his brethren, lest he might rise and rival him in the chieftainship. So

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when he heard of a child-birth, he anxiously inquired whether it was male or female; if male, he ordered its death. Sometimes they would try to deceive him, saying it was a girl, but he himself would go and see, and, finding it one of the obnoxious sex, would kill it with a stroke on the head. A veritable Pharaoh he was. Of course, the female population would only increase his wealth by the large sums that would-be husbands were willing to pay for them. Much of this marriage-money is sometimes paid just after the birth of the girl-child.

Nimu's brethren, however, could not long endure his cruel habits. They soon after separated, each one building a town of his own; and Mpanzu, one of the most successful and flourishing of them, built just a little way from Mongo, and called his town Nsamba. Still Nimu continued to harass his brethren, until at last they determined to get rid of him.

They arranged that on a certain market-day they would charge him with witchcraft, and make him drink the cup of poison. The day came, the people were gathered, the charge was made, and the cup was drunk. As Nimu staggered under its potent influence, his brethren rose and cudgelled him to death. So passed away their cruel tormentor, while they, his murderers, plundered all he had.

About the time of his murder there came

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to live a little to the south of Mongo another blacksmith, named Niku. He came bringing his favourite young wife, Mundele (named after the white man, who is called Mundele, probably because he was the first seller of *nlele* = cloth), their slaves, and all they had. They were natives of a district over sixty miles away to the south-east.

Niku was widely famed for his anklets, bracelets, and necklets, which he forged, and often travelled far to sell. He had often gone over to the Makuta district, and found there an excellent market for his goods and a capital place for smelting ore. Besides this, he made a fast friendship with Mpanzu of Nsamba. Returning from one of his most successful tours, he found his people almost in a state of starvation, so he determined to move over and live near his friend Mpanzu.

It was not without some fear on his wives' part, for well they knew in a land of strangers, if anything happened to Niku they would be sold as slaves to strange men. All objections were, however, in time overruled by the prospects of the future, and they moved over, building, as we have seen, about an hour or two south of Mongo, and near to Nsamba. Mpanzu was, of course, delighted.

Somewhat to the north of him lived Lunianga, the cruel, haughty chief of Nkondo, who, it is reported, would, upon the smallest

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supposed insult, order at once the murder of the innocent offender. He became very jealous of Niku, whose genius and ability were fast becoming the talk of the country; and in his heart he determined to find some suitable pretext for avenging himself. The haughtiness of Lunianga, however, was sure to rub itself against the jealousy of other chiefs around, and on one occasion he went too far in punishing some of the slaves. They met together, and fined him a number of slaves and a large amount of *nzimbu* (money).

Lunianga did not intend, however, to pay these slaves and money out of his own stock, and so impoverish himself. He hit upon the hellish plan of at once murdering Niku and enriching himself. He perfected his plan in secret, then calling all his men-slaves around him, he communicated to them his purpose. He promised each a good reward if they were successful. The slaves were at one with their master, as it was not the first raid on which they had been bound.

The plan was carefully laid that all should be ready that very evening, to save the matter getting bruited abroad, then all would start together as soon as it was dark. The night came; all was ready; guns were loaded, ammunition prepared, and they started forth to do their inhuman work of murder and plunder. It was nothing to them that their object was a most harmless

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and innocent man. They stealthily passed through Mongo and Nsamba on to Kingemba (Niku's town), where all was softly folded in the first sleep of night, and where they little dreamt that around their dwellings crept the forms of the murderers.

Around the compound of the chief they gathered, being stationed at every possible exit, while others lined the houses. Then at a given signal these last fired into the houses, the men rushed out and were shot, while the women and girls were captured. Everything these wretches could lay their hands on was seized, and the place looted. It was but the work of an hour or two, then quietly yet quickly they marched back, with the helpless crowd of captives, arriving at Nkondo before the dawn appeared. In the morning the news spread abroad, but there was none to lift a hand in revenge; indeed, many applauded, for why should strangers be allowed to live? 'This country is ours,' said they. As may be imagined, the fame and renown of Lunianga was increased, and even those who had fined him were too much afraid to push for payment.

Mpanzu, however, felt his friend's death very much, but he had no power to give redress; yet he did the best he could to show his friendship, he bought Mundele, Niku's favourite young wife, and married her himself, to save her falling into the hands of a cruel man. He was ever after very

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fond of her, and in her house he kept all his precious goods—a very high mark of esteem. He himself was a very rich and prosperous trader, and was anxious to have an heir of his own, one of his own children, and so doubtless he preferred the slave-wife to his other wives. The children of a free woman belong to her family, and not to the father, his heirs in that case being his sister's children.

In due time, Mundele bore Mpanzu a child, which, however, very soon died, to their great grief. Another was born, but unfortunately this one died also. Mpanzu felt it very keenly, but his wife even much more; she charged him with bewitching her children, to add to her great sorrow. She could not help remembering how she had been a free woman, and could hold her head high among women, but now she had been brought through sorrow on sorrow, her first husband murdered, her children dead, and she herself but a slave. As she brooded over her sorrow she almost lost her reason.

One day her friends missed her, and after long search they found her in the wood, lying in a small pool of blood. They lifted her almost unconscious body, and carried her back home. After a few days she fully recovered; she had in her distress gashed her throat badly to end her life.

Poor Mundele! she knew nothing of the mystery of suffering or of the source of all

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comfort; she knew only the name of God, and that name was often on her lips, and again and again would she cry out, '*Nzambi ovanga kansi kazeye vanga ko*' (God makes, but He does not know how to make). Dark, dark soul! she knew not that God could hear and answer the cry of the human heart. Hers was a bitter cry of anguish. But was it not a real prayer from an overcharged soul that God would change that long night of sorrow and wrong into a morning of joy and gladness? Surely it was, and God heard that fervent cry, though her husband's relatives, and even she herself, believed it was the result of fetishism, when some time after she gave birth to a daughter which lived.

This child was followed by the birth of a son, to whom the name of Matula was given. Yes, brighter days had come. She bore in all seven children who lived, an almost unheard-of number in Congo land. She herself was destined to see the day break over Congo, and four or five of her children were to become true and earnest Christians.

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD OF MATULA

CHILD-LIFE in Congo might be considered fascinating by some, and yet it is terribly pathetic. Could any of my readers pass through it, they would not be so delighted with its freedom as they imagine.

Out in the open from morn till night,
Chasing the bee while yet there is light;
No one to call you, no one to dread,
No one to pack you too early to bed.

From earliest infancy, long before it is able to creep, the little Congo infant is strung to the mother's back in the early morning, and carried off to the garden. Its first dawning consciousness looks up to the load on its mother's head, which varies according to the time of day—sometimes several baskets full of garden produce, or a bundle of firewood, or a large pot of water. It is amusing to watch the little one being sprinkled with the water which is occasionally jerked out of the pot. Little by

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little the child learns to carry incredibly awkward loads on its head. Never under any circumstances does any one in Congo carry a load in his hand which he can carry on his head.

As soon as the mother reaches the garden, the little one is laid down under a shrub, and the mother goes on with her hoeing until its cry calls her to its side. When it is satisfied, it may go right away to sleep; but if not, again it is slung on the mother's back, which provides a capital cradle for it. The little one, however, soon begins to crawl about, picking up and eating everything it can lay its hands on, the mother never interfering unless it has touched a poisonous plant. Thus the taste is acquired to eat almost everything that lives.

The caterpillar is seized, the frog is followed, and the rat is chased, as the movements of the little one are developed. The child gets an accurate knowledge of what is good and what is not in the meat line from actual experience. It also gets a very capital idea of the various uses of plants and their habits. The little one accompanies its mother, if it is a girl, right up to young womanhood, but if it is a boy only the first four or five years. The girl, of course, is taught to weed, hoe, sow, plant, and cook; the boy is taught to look after himself. In the garden, under his mother's eye, he has become a hunter on a small

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scale, and now it is a great delight to go through the woods with the big boys.

All day long they roam about, no school, no beating, no anything: liberty, liberty, unless, indeed, they hit another boy and make the blood come; then there is a palaver. Thus they watch the ants at work, see the squirrels spring from tree to tree, bound after the monkeys from branch to branch, and follow the track of the antelope through the bush. But in their young boyhood there is nothing like ratting. What a lot they get sometimes! Mother has then no trouble finding them *tonga* (meat) to their *kwanga* (cassava pudding).

When the boy gets about eight years old he may build his own little hut, or go to live with some bigger boys. He is too big now to think of having anything to do with mother, except sometimes—when he is hungry! At this time the boy begins to wear a cloth, and he may be taken notice of by the men of the town, who may take him in their trading journeys, and use him as a drudge, for which, however, they pay him a little.

I fancy some of my younger readers might say, 'What a jolly time those Congo boys have! No one to call them, no one to worry them, and no one to chastise them! Wouldn't it be jolly to be like them for a time?' Yes, I think it would; except when I was very lonely, then I should like some one to



CONGO CHILDREN.
THE SCHOOL AT WATHEN.
A CHRISTMAS GATHERING.

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restrain me. When I was sick and tired of having my own way, I should like some one to worry me; and when I did something I knew to be very, very wrong, I should like some one to chastise me—this would be some satisfaction of my moral sense.

It is wonderful how quickly these children tire of roaming about—it is aimless; and they very soon hang about the town looking dull and lonely, no one to guide them, no one to interest them, and when they become ill no one to help them, because, poor souls, no one knows the art of healing or nursing! When the little one is ill, the fetish doctor may be called, who will rub his hand over its body, and mutter something; but when it becomes very ill, oh! there is no one then to cool the heated brow, or moisten the parched lips, or sing a sweet lullaby.

The drum may beat, the weird fetish dance begin, but it only irritates the tossing little sufferer; and as it gets more feverish, its cloth may be taken off, while the dancers get more and more excited, dancing, shouting, screaming, and the little thing may pass away, killed by exposure and cold. Not intentional cruelty, but dark, dark ignorance.

If this is the only care the child whose parents are alive receives, what is done to the little motherless and fatherless bairns?—and oh, there are so many of them! Left alone, helpless, homeless, friendless, everybody glad when they die, God pity them!

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Those who grow up in Congo are truly the 'survival of the fittest.'

It was amid such surroundings that Matula was born and grew up. His childhood was pretty much as I have described the life of a boy to be. When he was about eight years old his father gave him a small drum, and many a day would he amuse himself with this, calling the boys and girls together for a dance, like the grown-up folks; they would imitate the funeral, marriage, and fetish dances—all of which, by-the-by, are pretty much the same; it takes a quick ear to tell the difference.

Like children at home, they played at house-building, house-keeping, etc., but not for long. One time a great day dawned for him; his father, through some palaver with the townpeople, got angry, and determined to move off and build about a quarter of a mile away. Matula didn't mind much about the row, but he enjoyed the great fun of flitting—as we say in our country.

The carrying of a town from one place to another is a very common occurrence; they move for various reasons—jealousy, sickness, scarcity of food, or bad neighbours. Those who are going to flit join together to help one another. They arrange the new site, mark out the positions of each house, then go and take their old houses to pieces. The roof is loosened and lifted off from the walls, each wall is taken up

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bodily and fitted into the marks on the new site, then the uprights and ridge-pole and the roof follows, carried by about a dozen strong men. Thus several houses could be pulled down, carried, and rebuilt in a day.

Matula quite enjoyed this flit of all his father's houses for wives, slaves, etc., and lent a hand with the rest of them. The quarrel causing the flit was not, however, of long duration, and Matula equally enjoyed the return to their old site again. He was a happy boy in those days, when father would take him to market, for well he knew he would not come back empty-handed. But many a weary hour he had to sit on the roadway some days, while his father had gone a little aside with some boon companions to drink *malavu* (palm-wine). At times he would be called to have a drink; thus the children are early taught to be drunkards.

Strange to say, while a boy his mother never allowed him to go to the town dance—a dance which cannot be described. He would see his father and mother prepare for it, putting on their best cloths and ornaments. His father, with a leopard's skin dangling before him, knife slung round his waist, his hair dressed in a fashionable style—sometimes long and arranged in ridges, sometimes with one ridge along the centre, and sometimes worked patterns all over the

Matula

head by shaving—and some patches of red ochre on his face. His mother with bright shining anklets, a necklace of fancy beads or shells, face stroked here and there with red, and hair cut into fancy patterns.

It was usually late in the evening when they started ; off they would go, shutting up all the little ones in the house behind them. There the children would go to sleep under the rhythmic but monotonous tom of the drum and the steady continuous jingle of the dancers. Careless, happy, and yet pitiful childhood ! Matula sleeps in quietness, little dreaming of the future or of the great events through which he has to pass.

O childhood ! how much would some not give to go back and dwell with thee, with thine innocence, frolics, and pranks ! and yet there is another childhood which Matula in after years found, but of which only those who live under the Gospel may know. Surely for this alone it is worth coming to Congo, to speak of a childhood to be obtained by even those who ever hear the cries of wild sorrow wrung out of slaves who have been sold or beaten, or who are haunted night and day by the stifled groans of their murdered victims. Dark, hopeless country, where there is no Christ to give back childhood, or to speak forgiveness to a guilty soul !

CHAPTER IV

MURDER OF HIS FATHER

ONE day Mpanzu called his ten-year-old boy to accompany him to market, and Matula was, of course, only too delighted to go. Well he remembers that day, for it was the last time that father and son journeyed together. There was a great talk in the market of the numerous deaths which were taking place, and how few children were born in the country. It seemed to every one that unless something was done they would all very quickly die out. Two things they might do: one, form a *ndembo*, a secret society, which is very fully described in Mr. Bentley's comprehensive work, *Pioneering on the Congo*; and the other, find out the witch who was causing all the deaths. After much discussion they determined on the former, believing this would ensure the young people being able to continue the race in case the elders died out.

Matula did not hear when *ndembo* would be formed, so he returned with his father quite unconcerned. His father had

Matula

bought half a sheep, which he brought home for dividing. All the youngsters sat round on the ground watching this operation, like so many young dogs. There were a good many of them, so it was a difficult matter to please all. Matula sat watching a good-sized bone, which he hoped would fall to his share; but, to his great grief, it went to an elder half-brother. He cried with rage, and refused the piece offered to him, so his father sent him off to bed. He did not cry long, however, for soon he heard the sound of the *ngome* (drum) and the voice of the witch-doctor. He came out, and fell as one dead; they covered him over with a cloth, several others did likewise, then there was a good deal of singing and firing of guns, and all those who feigned death were carried out to the camp in the wood outside the town. He found there altogether about one hundred boys and girls, principally from the country round.

He stayed in the place for about ten months, going through their senseless, sensual rites. He was elected chief of the youngsters, and received the new name of Masamba. The people were frightened to come near their camp; they were to all intents and purposes dead to their friends. Matula heard nothing of what was going on outside, and it was not until he was restored to his people that he heard the dreadful news that his father had been murdered.

Murder of his Father

After *ndembo* was formed, the people tried to persuade themselves that now all would be well. Sickness and death would be driven from their midst; and for a few weeks it seemed to them it was so. But the cold dry season came on, and, just like sharp winter at home, it finds out the weak and aged, and carries annually its quota to the grave.

What was to be done to stop the awful ravages of death? Who can the witch be? were questions in every mouth. They looked round and round among their people, and their eyes fell on one who had been a suspect for many years. That one was Mpanzu. Well, indeed, had it been for him if he had been content with but one wife and to be a moderate trader, but his skill and his evil passions killed him, as they have done many another man, even in Christian countries. He had over a dozen wives, and was the father of some thirty or forty children. He was a renowned trader and a reputedly rich man. How was it, then, that he had so many children, while so many others had none, and so many more were dying? How was it he was so rich, when so many of his relatives were poor? To them there was but one answer, 'Witchcraft.'

A large palaver was called with the doctor, but without Mpanzu; it did not last long. The thoughts of all were on one man, and well the doctor knew it, so as he whirled

Matula

round in his fierce fantastic dance he shouted out the name of 'Mpanzu.' 'Mpanzu it is,' said they all. They settled that on the next day in the early morn a few friends should go and get the natives of the town out to a big bush fire, but Mpanzu was to be kept back to drink *malavu* with some friendly chiefs who were coming to visit him.

The morning dawned, the people were highly excited as they went off to the hunt for rats, wild cats, and antelopes fleeing from the fire. Mpanzu felt quite honoured with the approaching visit of the chiefs. At last they came in solemn, stately array, as though they were lords of creation; mats were placed, on which they sat, and compliments were given and exchanged. Then the calabash was produced, hands were clapped, and the vessel passed in due succession.

Round it passed again, and as Mpanzu raised it to his lips—it was his last drop—the murderer, who stood behind him, deftly slipped a nooze over his head. They carried him off, no wife, no child near to weep or plead for him.

In secret their plan had been formed, and in secret they carried him to a more secret spot. There their fiendish work was done, yet they believed they did a righteous deed in ridding the world of a witch. They beat him severely, then hung him to a tree, leaving his body to rot. Surely the dark

Murder of his Father

places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty !

O earth ! when shalt thou give up the blood of thy slaughtered sons ? When shall thine innocent ones be avenged ? At that time almost hourly from some part of Congo there rose the cry of the poor murdered victim crying for vengeance. It was a 'cry in the night,' but it was heard by Him who sleeps not, and, thank God, He answered it. That day in part is here ; vengeance has come, a vengeance of peace proclaimed, of sin forgiven for all who claim it, even those whose hands have been steeped in blood. Many in Congo land have thus atoned for their awful sins ; through Christ they stand redeemed.

Poor Matula felt his father's murder most keenly ; it was the first real sorrow of his life. His father was very proud of him, for he was to have been his heir. Now he returns to find not a penny left of all his father's money, his mother has become the slave of another man, and all his father's slaves and flocks were sold in different directions. And now, poor lad, he must give himself in earnest to trade to keep himself from being sold, and to help to free his mother from slavery. But what can a little laddie of eleven years do ?

CHAPTER V

FIRST NEWS OF THE WHITE MAN

As we have seen, Matula is a child no longer, he must go out into the world if he is going to help his mother to free herself, and also to assist his five younger brothers and sisters. About a year has gone by since the last chapter, and we find Matula on his way one day to market with his mother. He has become quite a young trader, and attends all the markets round. There is a daily market which is held in different centres for four days, returning to the old centre every fourth day. Thus every town has a convenient and frequent market, and in some districts natives with a little inconvenience can attend a market daily.

On this particular occasion Matula and his mother arrived at the open market-place rather early. As they wait let us join them and watch the approaching marketers. There they come from all directions, a stream of women with baskets on their heads or slung over their shoulders, full of *kwanga*,

First News of the White Man

plantain, palm-nuts, ground-nuts, *nsafu*, pine-apples, etc. Here are the men, one with a piece of cloth over his shoulder, another carrying bright polished anklets, another dragging a goat, another with two chickens under his arm, and yet another with a little salt, etc. Then the sellers squat themselves on the ground, and spread their wares before them. The buyers dodge around and out and in ; the whole lot could be bought for a sovereign or so, yet there will be as much time wasted, as much breath spent, and a great deal more temper, than at a home market where a few thousands would exchange hands. There to the side is a company of palm-wine drinkers, and here is a bundle or two of firewood.

‘What does this mean, Matula?’ ‘*E Mfumu*’ (Oh, sir), ‘wait and see,’ he replies. We do wait, and presently we see a boy begin to light the firewood. Near by that fellow with the goat begins to beat it, not as though he were determined to kill it, but leisurely stroke upon stroke falls upon the struggling creature as he talks most unconcernedly to his laughing companions. The poor panting animal at last falls down exhausted, yet not unconscious. In this state it is thrown on the blazing fire. It is too much ; let us go away ere we hear its bleating amid the crackling of the thorns. This method continues until this day, and it will not be stopped until there is a state law

Matula

against it. Our influence, it is needless to say, as far as it goes, is quite against this unnecessary cruelty.

As we pass away from this flesh-creeping scene we see a crowd gazing in another direction. Yonder in the distance is a long stream of men coming from the direction of Mbanza Makuta. The eyes of the onlookers quickly detect that each man has his gun. 'Why, surely that is against the law?' say some. 'Yes, but there is something behind it,' answers one. 'I have heard it said there has been a war at Makuta, and some say that the white man who came some months ago to Makuta returned there again, and Bwaka Matu would not allow him to pass, but chased him out of the town, and shot him.' 'Is he dead?' asks another. 'I don't know, I haven't heard, but I hope so.' 'Was it one of the traders from the coast?' 'No, they say it was a *mundele*, a *nzambi*' (white man of God, so missionary).

Matula was all ears to hear all these rumours, and presently he heard the song of the singer who was leading the procession, which was now near at hand. He listened intently to catch the words, and there came nearer and nearer the full account, highly exaggerated, of how the white man had attempted to pass through Makuta, but the chief in his might had chased him away, and shot him. 'Oh, great is our chief, and who shall stand up against him?' Soon

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the singer appears with a broad patch of red down his forehead and nose, followed by the chief wearing a long cloth over his shoulders and a leopard's skin cap on his head, a spear in his hand, and behind him come in single file about a hundred braves, all with guns or spears.

The singer takes up his song again, while the chief walked around with conscious stride, *kusonga* (to show himself), as Matula says. He challenged any one who dared to side with the white man, and swore that *nkwa malu mole* (a possessor of two legs—from the fact of his wearing trousers) should never again appear in his country; he only was chief, and there was no other. The people left their marketing, took up the song and dance, and declared that 'never, never again should a white man appear in their country.' Some of the more timid ones were afraid, however, that the white man would return in great force to take revenge.

It was quite true the chief had shot a white man, but only wounded him. It will be remembered that white man was Tom Comber, who with Hartland was trying to get a road through to Stanley Pool. Through the obstinacy of Bwaka Matu that road was for a time abandoned, and Makuta was left to itself for a few years. But some seven or eight years afterwards Mr. Bentley visited the town, and he has visited it on an average

Matula

twice a year since, with the most happy results.

Revenge has been taken, but not a revenge of the sword. At Makuta to-day there is the most flourishing section of our native church. Mr. Bentley very graphically describes the change at Makuta in his book. 'In August, 1897, Nkonzi, a nephew of Bwaka Matu (who ordered the shooting of Comber), was baptized. A month or two later he was very anxious to make some amends for the great sin of his family. He wanted to send a present to the father of Comber, but as he was so far away he could only send some little thing. He wrote him a letter deploring the wrong done to his son, who was the bearer of such good news from God. He urged that his uncle Bwaka had done it all in ignorance, and he begged him to forgive it and to be his friend. He had learned to know and trust Jesus, and was indeed thankful that the Gospel had been brought to his people.' Such, then, was the revenge God had taken by converting many of that old proud and wicked chief's relatives. He himself, however, did not live long after his foul deed.

This, however, is a little aside. To return to Matula. It was about the first time that he had ever heard of the white man, so he listened most eagerly to all that was said of him. He heard him described as a 'possessor of two legs,' as though other men

First News of the White Man

had no legs at all. The white men who were at the coast were traders, but these two who had come to Makuta were of a different sort. They had some nice cloth which they gave away, and talked of *Nzambi* (God) and some strange things about 'love.' They were altogether a strange people, these *mundele* (white men). They had no guns, and had not brought many carriers to force a road through; who they were and what they were, who could say? Their country was at the bottom of the sea, that seemed clear; perhaps they were spirits of the slaves who had been sold come back to worry them. At any rate, they were 'eaters of men,' and carried off as many as they could to work for them in their strange country. The only thing that could be done was never to allow them to come back, and whenever or wherever they were heard of always to avoid them as *ndoki* (witches).

All this, of course, frightened young Matula terribly, and as he returned that day from the market with his mother it was with the hope that he would never have the misfortune to meet a white man all through his life. Though he tried not to think of them by day, yet he dreamt of them by night. Often and often they came to him, sometimes in one shape and sometimes in another, while he was all the time trying to run away from them, but never could. And yet he was destined to have a good deal to

Matula

do with these selfsame white men; and just as dreams are proverbially the reverse of facts, Matula in after years got to love the white man very much, and was glad to run to him for help and protection.

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE MAN

MATULA was firm in his determination that he would have nothing to do with the white man if he could possibly help it. For the next few years he developed considerably as a trader. Though but a youth he was looked upon as one of the most cute among them, and he made money pretty quickly. He fairly soon assisted his mother to free herself, for which he had to pay an exorbitant figure. As he grew older he took longer and longer excursions into the country for trade.

Early in 1885 with a party of others he journeyed right away to the north bank of the River Congo, a distance of some eighty miles or more. On the way they passed the great road which Stanley made from Man-yanga to the Pool, at which they were greatly surprised. On the other side they heard some talk of a railway coming up, but what that was, or what it would do, no one could exactly say.

Some of the party had visited Boma, and there saw the big steamers. They were told

Matula

‘that was the thing,’ but they could not see how those steamers could come up over land. It was altogether a mystery, and could only be sorcery. Yet these white men had got an awful lot of *ngangu* (ingenuity), and there was no telling what they could do.

On returning they passed Ngombe (Wathen), our present station, which had lately been removed from Manyanga, and was in course of erection. This was actually the first time Matula had ever seen a white man, and now only at a distance, for they passed through very rapidly, lest they should be bewitched. Still Matula was very much struck with the white man’s *ngangu*. On this trip he found that the neighbourhood of Ngombe was an excellent place for trade, so he often afterwards came over with sheep, goats, pigs, etc., though he kept clear of the station, and did not come near it for some two years afterwards. Then he brought over some sheep for sale at Vunda (about two hours from here), and called at Nlemvo’s (Mr. Bentley’s native assistant in translation). In honour of his visit he killed a sheep and gave to Nlemvo the heart, a token of his friendship.

It was just shortly before Nlemvo’s own baptism, and as an earnest disciple of Christ he talked much and long to Matula. But it was hard for him to think the *ju* (custom) of his country was altogether wrong, or to rid himself of the suspicions he had of the



SCENE ON THE LOWER CONGO.
A MISSIONARY ITINERATING.
GROUP OF WATHEN BOYS AND GIRLS.

The White Man

white man. In the morning Nlemvo got Matula to go to prayers in the little grass prayer-house, but everything was to him a strange enigma. When all closed their eyes at prayer he kept his open, afraid lest they should do something to him when he was not looking. Yet the first seed was sown and the first step taken.

He went over to Vunda with his sheep, and there found Mr. Cameron, who had gone over for the day. He was surprised at the white man's *ngemba* (friendliness) to the people, who watched his every action, and scrutinized his clothes and goods. It was a great delight to watch his food being prepared and the table laid. Then it seemed as though they had never seen any one eat in their life before. All crowded round and watched the movements of knife and fork with great wonder, and when he gave a few biscuits to the crowd, which they divided to each person a piece, their delight knew no bounds, and roars of laughter broke out on every side. But when he began to speak of Him in whose name he had come it was as though he were a leper, and every one slunk into his own house. Yet his look and smile sank as seeds into the heart of Matula, and he began to feel that the white man was a friend. The nervous fear of him had gone, yet the popular voice was against the 'new teaching,' and by this for several years Matula was overruled.

Matula

Soon after this Mr. Bentley began to visit the Makuta district, and after a time the people in Tungwa decided on giving him a boy, to his surprise and pleasure. The chief said he would bring him along. Matula hearing of this, determined to accompany them on a trading journey. All went well till they arrived at Kinketa, a town some four or five hours from Ngombe. As they entered in single file, Matula at the head leading a sheep, a man stepped out, saying, *fut e mpaku* (pay the tax); they passed him, however. But soon another stepped out with the same demand; him they also passed. But ahead a company with guns awaited them. Those in the rear ran off. Matula was captured and tied, his sheep was taken from him, and he was fined five hundred brass rods to allow the rest to pass. There was no getting away from it. The fine was paid, and they pursued their journey. It was not the most happy event, just as they were nearing our station, and had begun to take an interest in the white man's teaching. (I am glad to say that the State has practically stamped out this illegal system of taxation.)

In 1890 and 1891 Mr. Bentley passed through Mongo—Matula's town—but unfortunately he was away on both occasions, and indeed it was not until 1894, when Mr. Bentley had returned from his furlough in England, that Matula met him out in the

The White Man

district. On that occasion Matula was starting on another trading tour, when he met Mr. Bentley going in the direction of Mongo.

Matula had a brother with a bad long-continued ulcer, so he begged the missionary to be sure and go and see him, while he himself gave up his proposed trip, and ran back to tell of the missionary's approach. Matula then went out to meet him, and escorted him into the heart of the town. He soon dispensed the medicine, and Matula was so delighted that he brought a couple of large fowls as a *matabeesh* (dash). But Mr. Bentley had learned on former experiences to refuse all dashes, as they were the source of much trouble; some people classed the missionary with the fetish-doctors, who are most exorbitant, and others said he only came for what he could get, and never gave a sufficient dash in return.

So, while waiving the present, Mr. Bentley sat down and talked to these apparently willing listeners. Many of them had never heard the Gospel story before. He told them of that God whose name they knew, who made them and all things, who caused the rain to fall and the sun to shine to make our food grow. He was always thinking of us, yet we were unthankful, and our habits were vile in His sight. He told them of God's love in sending His Son Jesus to redeem us from our sin, and give us power

Matula

to conquer evil and live holy. He spoke of the judgment to come, and that all our evil actions would follow us there. This great God knew all we did. He warned them to flee from the wrath to come to Jesus, who alone could save them.

After he left they talked much over these things. Their old habits and customs were dear to them; why should they accept these new teachings? No, they would not give the old up. These new things are only *kindoki* (witchcraft), for as the rain fell and their food grew by the aid of *nkisi* (fetishes) any other suggested source must be sorcery. So the 'palavers of God' were nothing but witchcraft, and ought to be avoided, and any who taught them was himself a witch. This was all the length their philosophy could go, round a circle; 'that which is not fetishism is witchcraft, and that which is not witchcraft is fetishism.'

Yet there was one man in that crowd who thought much and pondered over what he had heard, and that man was Matula. Thus he had got a step further; the white men were not only friendly, but the things they taught were for our good, and worth remembering. He took every opportunity he could of hearing about these things. He visited Bukusu, who shortly before had returned to Tungwa. He became very interested in him, and looked at his books, and wished that he himself could read; but

The White Man

from that time he determined to have a boy of his own taught.

On his return he mentioned this to his friends; but they were very much annoyed, and endeavoured to persuade him against it. However, he arranged with two boys that they should go with Mr. Bentley when he paid them another visit. His mother, however, got to hear of this, so she bribed the boys to disappear as soon as Mr. Bentley was at hand, and not to return until after he had gone.

A few weeks afterwards, Mr. Bentley, remembering the interest on his former visit, called again, and was not surprised to hear from Matula that he had two boys ready for him. He only spent the night there, and in the morning Matula sent for the boys; but they were nowhere to be found. He felt a trick had been played upon him; so he told Mr. Bentley he would follow after him, with one, at any rate.

Messengers were sent out to hunt for the boys, and at last one was caught; he came up just before Mr. Bentley had got clear of the town—a big, fat, jolly boy of thirteen or so, dressed in a new singlet Matula had given him, carrying a rat in his hand. Mankwenia was his name, and Matula told him he was to go and become a *mundele anaombe* (a white black man) like Bukusu, and he promised to come over and see him sometimes, bringing some money and some fowls.

Matula

This was enough to please any boy, so, with a bright face, he said *kiambote* (good-bye) to all, and joined the little caravan to journey to Wathen, not troubling his head much about witches or witchcraft.

CHAPTER VII

MATULA'S CONVERSION

N^O sooner had Mankwenia gone away from Mongo than the people began to hate Matula, for now he had distinctly broken away from them and gone over to the white man's side. His mother cursed him, and called him a witch ; so he kept away as much as possible on trading tours. He himself could not understand the new feelings surging within, and yet he could not break himself away from them. Mankwenia in the mean time got on fairly well at school, and soon passed from the alphabet into the syllable class. He was a jolly, laughing, good-tempered boy, and made friends with everybody.

He had only arrived at the station a few months before my own arrival, and I remember well, the first time I saw him, he had on an old torn singlet—against orders—which he had great trouble in keeping on ; his face was full of sauciness and fun. To see him run with the other boys was a great sight. He was sure to be left behind, he

Matula

was so fat and flat-footed. It was quite a loss to the station when, a few months afterwards, he went on a visit to his town, with Mr. Bentley, but did not come back again. We were all very sorry, as we had really got to like the boy.

He was an impressionable lad, and just as he had joyfully gone to the station on Matula's promises to give him presents, so he stayed behind in his town when his mother tempted him with the most dainty dishes she could make. He lent a willing ear to her story of how she had been grieving for him, afraid he had been eaten, and how she was sure if he returned again he would be eaten. He did not believe much in the 'eating' story, but he never liked to see any one unhappy, so her tears and entreaties made him determine to stay behind, and not join Mr. Bentley at the place agreed to. We in our short-sightedness deemed it a pity, but in reality it was a thing over which to rejoice.

Matula had not the heart to fight the mother (his aunt) a second time, but he did want to know all that Mankwenia had heard at Ngombe. Many an hour did they spend together in earnest talk, Mankwenia doing his best to tell him of the great God he had heard of, and of Jesus Christ His Son, while Matula did his best to take it all in. Then Matula, wherever he went in those days, would tell the people to whom he

Matula's Conversion

spoke of these strange things that Mankwenia had learned.

Matula often saw the boy conning over his *Mwelo a Zayi* (*Gate of Knowledge*, first Congo reading-book), and he sat himself down beside him to learn. They made an arrangement that every day they should have school for themselves. Poor Mankwenia! This was a great trial for him; for, to tell the truth, in his easy-going way some of the letters he had forgotten, so it was no wonder the 'p's' would become 'b's' or 'd's,' and the 'm's' 'w's,' or the 'n's' 'u's,' and somehow 'f' would get mixed up with 't' in an unaccountable manner. So it was not much progress they could make, but Matula felt they were getting on. Then, in the evenings, Matula would gather as many as cared to come together for singing, and Mankwenia taught them, after a fashion, some of the simple tunes he had learned, such as, 'Jesus loves me,' or, 'Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus,' etc.

Matula says he would not now vouch for the correctness of the singing, but he would for the heartiness of it. For often would he go out about a mile in different directions to try and hear the singing, as it wafted on the quiet evening air; if he couldn't hear it well, he would return and say to them, 'Shout out, and raise your voices.' When he heard it distinctly he would come back and say, *Wambote kikilu* (It is very good),

Matula

then they would have it all over again. Has earth any more pathetic sight than this company of dark heathen souls just coming out into dawn? Not one of them really knows the truth of that beautiful little hymn they sing to the tune of 'Jesus loves me.'

'Jizu ntuzolele,
Nkand 'a Nzambi nvovele wo,
Yeto awonso tu an 'andi,
Okutulundanga.'

Chorus.

'Jizu ntuzolele
Elo ntuzolele
Jizu ntuzolele,
Oyandi Nkundi eto.'

TRANSLATION.

'Jesus He is loving us,
The Book of God has told us **this**,
Truly we His people are,
He us ever keeps with care.'

Chorus.

'Jesus He is loving us ;
Yes, He is loving us,
Jesus He is loving us,
Our only Friend is He.'

Everywhere Matula and his wife went they sang these simple hymns, and told the people what they were learning. Matula had for the time being given up trading tours, that he might devote himself to these new experiences. It is almost impossible to fix the real date of the spiritual awakening of a poor heathen soul. Whether that awakening really came then or not till some

Matula's Conversion

time afterwards he himself does not know. 'Tis very evident, however, that the work of grace had been begun in his heart.

One day about that time the chief of Makuta, where Ponde had but lately begun to teach, came to Mongo. He told Matula how he himself had begun to learn 'A B D' (Congo language has no need of C), but he found that this led to other things. It led, for example, to reading the *Ekangu Diampa* (New Testament), which spoke against drunkenness, adultery, lying, murder, etc.; as he did not want to give these things up, he left off trying to read, or to have anything more to do with Christianity.

Matula was as yet very dark in his own mind, many things he could not understand, he was just content to follow the little light he had. He knew that such acts as murder and adultery were against God's teaching; indeed, before he had heard of that teaching he loathed murder, but he did not yet see that getting drunk was also displeasing to God. In his endeavour, therefore, to get the chief of Makuta to continue his reading and attending prayers, he told him he could continue to do this, and yet drink as much palm-wine as he wished. 'All right,' said the chief, 'let us have some *malavu*, at any rate.' A calabash was brought, and both drank pretty freely of it. Then Matula broke out into song, not the ribald, obscene song of the drunkard, but the sweet words

Matula

of Tom Comber's hymn to the tune of ' Lord,
a little band and lowly ' (Rousseau).

'Nzambi S'eto u nkwa nkenda,
Toma tal'e nsi zeto
Konso nsi kwa nsoki yasibma,
Tombe kingi kiabukawa.
Nzambi S'eto u nkwa nkenda,
Toma tal'e nsi zeto.'

TRANSLATION.

'God our Father, full of kindness,
Look upon our country ;
Every land which cursed by sin is,
And where darkness great abounds.
God our Father, full of kindness,
Look upon our country.'

The people thought he was mad. Who had ever heard a drunkard sing such hymns ? His name spread all over the country, and the people came to see him from far and wide. In due time he learned that drunkenness was unseemly, and a great sin in the sight of God, so that he eventually abstained from drinking *malavu*. This evil habit is proportionately as great a curse in this country as at home ; but every Christian on the Congo is practically a total abstainer.

Matula was slowly progressing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But the devil does not, however, allow his servants to slip easily out of his grasp. He followed Matula closely, and, as we have seen, seemed to gain a victory when Matula got drunk. But I don't know what he could have thought when he heard the drunkard sing a song

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of prayer to 'God the Father.' Yet he felt very sure of victory. If Matula could not be led into blasphemy through drink, then he knew he could be led by the ring of conceit—the greatest curse of the native—and there was indeed much danger of Matula being thus led. He was becoming well known, and his actions described in every town and market ; who could withstand such popularity ?

Thank God, however, the devil does not have it all his own way in warring for a soul. The Holy Spirit had begun a great work in the heart of Matula, and it must be accomplished. To save Matula from his growing conceit and pride, which was much too subtle for him to contend with, he must be thrown down for a time, so that to men and devils it would appear he had given up his faith in God. And it was so.

Not many weeks after the Makuta chief's visit to him his mother became very ill ; then came a time of great darkness. His old heathen superstitions, from which he had been getting loosened, clung round him more closely than before, as a last effort to keep him bound. They suggested his mother was bewitched, and he became possessed with the idea that Mankwenia must have done it, for he had come to them with these new palavers, which every one had said must be witchcraft. It was a terrible hour of darkness. He called all his people

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together, and told them that he believed the boy was a witch. He ordered the women-folk not to go to market, and neither they nor Mankwenia were to leave the town so long as his mother was ill. Then he who had hated in time past the crime of witch-murder now made an awful threat that, if his mother died, Mankwenia would also be put to death. He commanded the lad not to sing or teach, or speak of God's palavers again; and many of the people heartily supported him, glad that Matula was returning to and even overstepping his old life.

For some days there was great anxiety, and it seemed as though the devil were really going to have the victory. His mother lay between life and death, but the turn slowly came for the better, and gradually she got well again. This for a time made him believe more strongly in the old customs. But was it not of God that his hands were kept from blood, so that in after days, when charges were made against him, he might truthfully say he had never murdered or even assisted to murder any one?

For the next few months Matula continued in his old ways, gave up trying to learn, gave up singing, and tried to give up all thought of God. As a counter-excitement he went in largely for slave-dealing, and following out his old trading instincts. By attending markets, and being enveloped in

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the habits of his old life, he thought the voice of conscience was completely silenced.

One day his trading led him over to Makuta, where the chief received him gladly, and congratulated him on giving up 'God's palaver.' For the next few days they gave themselves up to the enjoyment of native life. On that occasion his wife, Kento, accompanied him; she is without doubt the most faithful companion and wife I have yet met amongst the natives of Congo. The evening before they left they heard the singing of those who had gathered to prayers under Ponde's direction, and at once they were impelled to go. As they sat there they both became conscience-stricken; the Spirit of God asserted His power, and they wept sorely at the remembrance of how they had both gone about singing some of these selfsame hymns, and how happy they were then. And as the remembrance came to their mind, the decision was made within that these things they would seek, and no other.

His first step was to make friends with Ponde. This is quite a business here, almost as much as, and certainly more than in some quarters, is made at home when a young couple form an attachment and engagement. Matula invited Ponde over to his town, which invitation he was not slow to accept, when shortly afterwards he arrived at Mongo. Matula was exceedingly

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delighted, and in honour of the occasion and confirmation of the friendship, he had a good deal of food of different kinds prepared, and a couple of fowls boiled—a prodigal extravagance; then he brought a large sheep for Ponde, which, however, he wisely refused, not to give outsiders room to talk of his greed. This friendship was a very real thing to both of them right up to the time of Ponde's death in 1898. (His most interesting story is told by Mr. Bentley.)

After the feast Matula invited the people to come together again, as he wanted to renew the teaching and singing in the town, and now Ponde had come to spend a few days with them. A good number gathered to meet him, whom they had known almost from infancy. Then, what a time of singing they had! Matula says, 'We only knew one or two hymns, but Ponde sang such a lot! Mankwenia could help him here and there a little, but we—well, we could only do the best we could, open our mouths and imitate the sound and speech.' What a sight! I cannot help feeling sometimes it was more pleasing to God than that of many a rich, well-dressed, well-paid, well-trained choir. For there was certainly more than one in that little company singing not for the sake of the music—there wasn't much of that—but for the sake of all it meant; their hearts were thrilled, and their deepest feelings stirred. Every now and again Ponde would

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stop to explain the hymns or certain portions of them; then he would tell them of his own conversion, and how he was led to trust in Jesus.

What a change it makes in the life! Ponde could speak of his own experience; how it makes the surly man pleasant, and the angry man gentle. This was much deeper than even Matula fancied the change could go. He did know Christianity must change the great outward evil deeds, but the every-day character, or closer, more constant vices to which every man is prone, he had not thought of these as sins, much less the thought of changing them. How eagerly he listened! He was learning more of the Christ—that not only did He save from the punishment of sin, but also from its power.

Here was one whom he knew from childhood, and what a marvellous change had come over his character! He wondered much at it, for though now his pride was getting lowered, yet he was subject at times to great outbursts of passion. For this he was destined hereafter to suffer. But those days on which Matula now looks back with a sense of joy were days of calm before a great storm. In them he learned much of the power of God, and a simple faith was created which he has never since lost, so that in times of greatest trial he could always firmly and fervently say, 'God my Father knows.'

CHAPTER VIII

TROUBLES AND TRIALS

FUNERALS in Congo land are carried out pretty much according to the wish of each town or district. Yet there are many general characteristics, especially when any person of importance dies. The body is likely to be smoked for several days over a small fire, then wrapped in a piece or two of cloth, and in this state it may be kept for weeks, or months, or even years. Opportunity is thus given for friends and relatives to vie with one another in bringing the largest presents, or the most cloth in which to wrap the body for burial. For very great chiefs, guns are fired, drums and horns are played almost incessantly, and there is continual feasting in the town. Then, on the day of the burial, the people flock from all quarters, the body is wrapped in immense wrappings, and it is put into the grave with almost all the possessions which the man had while alive.

Two or three years ago the great chief of this neighbourhood died ; during the time of his lying in state, from 50 to 100 goats

Troubles and Trials

were killed, and a great many more fowl, 500 small kegs of powder were fired, the body was wrapped to the size of an ordinary-sized dining-table, and some 200 pieces of cloth—1600 yards—were buried with it, along with several exceedingly heavy tusks of ivory, and some very valuable leopards' and other wild beasts' skins. The ambition of every man is that people will talk of the amount of stuff wasted at his funeral, and for this he will begin to lay by from boyhood. On the day of the funeral, during the feasting, there is often a great deal of fighting, and not uncommonly knives are drawn. They are not far behind the native Irish in knowing what is due to a wake of any importance.

A few days after the events of the last chapter, one of the mothers of Matula's second wife died at Nzundu, so Matula had to show his respect for the dead. He carried some considerably large gifts, and several pieces of cloth, and stayed for the burial. The people were much surprised that he would not drink palm-wine, which evil habit he had given up when he made friends with Ponde. He told them all of the change in his heart, and how much better it was to follow God and leave off the old habits and customs. They did not pay very much attention, however, feeling sure in their own minds there was something going wrong with him. Yet they did not

Matula

forget what he said, but remembered it against him in after days.

On the day after the burial, Matula was returning to Mongo, and called at a market on the way home. As he waited a little while, a native of Nzundu, who was drunk, came and asked him for a piece of cloth, which Matula refused to give, knowing full well if he did so all he had would quickly go amongst his lazy, sponging relatives. The man, however, had been put up to worry Matula, so he followed him to his house, where, on account of his entreaties, Matula did give him sufficient to dress himself. He then most ungratefully upbraided Matula for his stinginess, and also charged him with bewitching his people with these new palavers and enriching himself. He worked himself up into such a frenzy, that he picked up a stick and hit Matula over the head with it.

Then Matula, taken unawares, was overcome with anger ; he rushed in and got his gun and fired it at the man, but, most fortunately, missed him. Immediately after he repented it, but the man ran off at once to his people in a terrible rage, shouting out that Matula had shot him. Nothing was, of course, said of the provocation, but it was enough to rouse the whole town. Every man got his gun, and went over to Mongo, wild with passion. The women made for the woods, there were few men about.

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Matula wanted to talk the palaver and pay any fine they might inflict; but no, they would listen to nothing. They caught him and put him into a house, determining to murder him in the evening. The house they believed to be safe, not having any hinder exit, as is the case in many other houses, then they sat down to watch.

Matula prayed earnestly to God, and encouraged himself with the words, 'God knows.' He looked about for a means of escape; at first he thought there was none, but by-and-by he saw one corner of the gable-end was not very closely knit together, so, dexterously raising one of the little cross-rods, and gently parting the grass, he managed to slip through into a thick wood, which the house adjoined. He there found a small track, which led him to the water, and along the little river he went, so that his footprints could not be traced. Soon after his escape, his foolish would-be captors looked in to see if he were safe, but to their great astonishment he was nowhere to be seen. 'He must have spirited himself away.' 'What a witch he was!' 'Tis almost incredible, yet they fancied he would be too frightened to attempt escape, as so many of their victims had been. They called and called, but no one answered. Then they plundered all they could lay their hands on, after which they hunted about for the women.

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After searching, they found Maluvunu—Matula's sister—and carried her off with them. On their arrival at Nzundu, guns were fired, and a great deal of powder wasted, to celebrate their capture, and to inspire courage to attack the people of Mongo on the following day. Well they knew Matula's friends would go to avenge Maluvunu. In the mean time he kept in hiding, and did not sleep much that night. He heard the firing at Nzundu, so surmised that they had returned, but wondered what they had done in his town.

The next morning, as he was returning stealthily to Mongo, he saw a little ahead of him the Nzunduites, who were marching to his town. He called out to them, 'Wait for me, and I will go along with you!' Hearing Matula's voice so unexpectedly, and not seeing him anywhere, they were panic-stricken, and all ran helter-skelter back to their town. After they had disappeared, Matula rose and pursued his journey.

On nearing Mongo he met his relatives there coming out armed, and determined to release Maluvunu and avenge him. He tried to dissuade them, saying it was wrong to fight, and they ought to try and settle the matter some other way. But they would not return, yet he did not accompany them.

Warfare in Congo is a very tame affair. A shower of rain will sometimes postpone the battle indefinitely. They want noise;

Troubles and Trials

so if a good deal of powder is fired, they have had a famous battle. As every man is too afraid to get shot, he does his best to keep out of the way. So it is a very rare thing to get wounded, much less killed.

These warriors met the next day, and, after long fighting, one man was actually wounded on the other side, yet very slightly. However, blood was drawn, and they did their very best, on the following day, to equalize matters, and, as a result, their efforts were crowned with greater success than they anticipated, for one of Matula's lot was killed. The war was now stopped, to consider the cause (!) of this man's death.

Poor souls! They still believed it was witchcraft, and charged Matula with the murder! He was not present, and the uninitiated might ask, 'How possibly could it be thought that Matula desired the loss of one of his own men?' They put him down as the cause of the war, therefore he was responsible; and, besides, if they did not charge him with the murder, he would most likely claim heavy damages from the man who had killed his relative. Thus the war was stopped for the time being, and they now sought only the life of Matula, whom they denounced on every hand as a witch. He must now war, not with the weapons of man's warfare, but wholly with spiritual, against the powers of darkness, which were gathering to overwhelm him.

CHAPTER IX

PERSECUTION

EVERY one now remembered all that Matula had ever said about 'God's palavers,' and well they might, for he had never tried to hide the light he had, or been ashamed to confess Christ before men. To the majority of the natives these things belonged to sorcery, so on his head must come all the evils that befell his relatives far and near. Poverty, sickness, and death were more prevalent than ever, and unless he would give up all these new ideas of his, and return to his old life, he would have to be murdered. The most of his old friends forsook him, and agreed with those who said he was a witch.

One old chief in particular, who had been most friendly to Matula, thought it was due to himself to break off the friendship, and make the first attack on his life. He was a very subtle old fellow, and laid his plan most carefully. He called a great fetish palaver to renew the strength of his *nkisi* for fighting and hunting. Then

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quietly he told his own people it was for the purpose of killing Matula, when he should appear. His plan was to feign illness, or to make some excuse for sending for Matula. Then they could easily murder him. Every one was sworn to secrecy. All was ready, and they waited for the day arranged to come.

There was one true friend, however, amongst those in the secret, who went and flattered the chief, and begged permission to go to market for some *malavu*. He went a round-about way, calling at Mongo, and warned Matula not to go on any pretence whatever, if they sent for him. That evening a messenger came, saying the chief was very ill, and desired to see him. Matula's brother, however, would not let him go, saying he himself would go and see him. He went, and found the chief really very ill. He had been taken ill most suddenly. On the following day—the day for which he had planned the murder—he himself died. It was a sudden intervention by God. Let it be explained otherwise by those who will.

A short time afterwards that elder brother, who had gone in his stead, died. Shortly before his death he called his brethren around him. To the rest he gave a stick, saying, 'It is yours to speak palavers and fight, if necessary, but let Matula alone, let him live quietly, trade and *sambila Nzambi*' (pray to God). As the words of a dying

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man are revered here even more than at home, Matula's immediate brethren left him largely to himself.

The enemies of Matula, who belonged in fact to the senior branch of his family, however, found in these deaths increased cause for persecution. But how were they to attack him? Murder had been tried and failed, for on two occasions he had marvellously escaped them. Then these hounds of the evil one hatched up a story of adultery against him and his four younger brethren. They found a woman who was willing to sell her soul for the large bribes they offered, and she charged him with it. He was taken to two of the great chiefs of the neighbourhood, one of whom was chief of the woman and the other had lost many people by death. The one fined him forty men for those who had died, and the other three hundred thousand *nzimbu* (almost £80) for adultery.

It was a most preposterous judgment, but there was no way out of it. His enemies felt sure he would now be sold into slavery. He himself very much feared he would be sold, and told his wife—Kento—she had better return to her people; but she answered in the words of another, of whom she had never heard, 'Where thou goest, I go.' 'If you go into slavery, so will I.' It was useless to persuade her otherwise.

Against the expectation of his enemies,

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he did his best to pay off this great fine, and actually paid half the money fine and five men. He had a great many sheep in different parts of the country which he did not want to be forced to sell. It was clear to all that, in time, he would pay, so his enemies set themselves to hatch another story by which they felt confident his life would be taken.

One man remembered how that some years before a woman had died under strange circumstances ; in fact, she died of smallpox. Now what they had to do was to make sure of their facts, and charge Matula with her murder. The State had but lately come to Tumba, about six hours off, and had issued laws against murder, threatening to hang any one condemned. The thing was, therefore, for them to make their case clear, and Matula's life would pass out of their hands into that of the State, and he would be sure to be hung. They therefore bound him and carried him as a murderer to Tumba.

Tumba, in the early part of 1896, was a wilderness ; at midsummer it was a huge workshop, at the end of the year it was a complete and flourishing town. Traders' stores had risen like mushrooms, an inconceivable number for the place. The commissioner's residence was erected, as also the houses of the officials, with a barracks for the fifty odd soldiers.

It will be remembered, by some of my

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readers, that Tumba is the scene of perhaps the most pathetic story in the whole history of our Congo Mission. Mr. Stephens commenced the station there in the May of 1896. At the end of the year, on the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Pople, he went up river for forward work at Yakusu. For several months Mr. Pople was very unwell, and eventually, in the following April, he died. Poor Mrs. Pople did not long survive him; six short weeks passed, and her body was laid beside that of her lamented husband.

It was in the early part of that year that Matula was carried to Tumba, before the judge, charged with murder and adultery. The judge at that time only visited Tumba at irregular intervals, and he was largely in the hands of a native interpreter, who, of course, was open to large bribes. Indeed, every non-Christian native is as open to bribes as a flower is to the sun's rays. The natives, to a man, are such capital talkers, and the majority such sincere liars; they can, with undaunted visage and in the most earnest manner, paint the blackest vice white, and as devotedly change the fairest character into a villain of villains. Their manner would deceive the smartest uninitiated counsel for defence. Matula's enemies had worked up their case with the greatest care. To the charge of the murder of those two women they added the old charge of adultery, on which, however, they did not lay much

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stress, yet the woman was there to swear against him. They got the ear of the interpreter, soon after arrival at Tumba, and bribed him pretty heavily, as an earnest of what he would eventually get, should Matula be hung.

A day or two afterwards the case was called. The interpreter informed the judge the nature of the charges, and, without any stretch of imagination, he told what he knew of the case—from one side—and the character of the criminal charged. Witnesses were called—every one of whom was a false witness—to substantiate the charges made. It was clear from their story that Matula was an *umpumbulu* (a most lawless man), and the country would be all the better to be rid of him. Then the witnesses for the defence were heard, but they could only testify to what they knew of his character, and maintain that they believed him innocent. Cross-questioning brought out that Matula had been fined on several occasions, and that the chiefs around looked upon him as an *umpumbulu*. Their evidence, in fact, only helped the prosecution.

It was going hard against Matula; his enemies were rejoicing. Then the judge called for Matula himself to speak; he asked him what he had to say to these charges which were made against him. He then gave a simple straightforward account of his relations with these people who were

Matula

prosecuting him, and he finished up with, 'My lord, these people have desired my life, and attempted to murder me time and again; God knows I am innocent of the charges they make, for I have never in my life killed or assisted to kill any one.'

The judge was greatly struck with his simple and apparently true evidence. He was in perplexity; was he to accept this man's statement against all who had witnessed against him? His interpreter, he knew, fully believed him guilty. He dismissed the court during lunch-time. He had to leave the following morning; should he now sentence Matula to be hung? No, he would not, he would give him an opportunity to clear himself; but if he could not do so, next time he came up he would sentence him.

Returning to the court, the prisoner was called. The judge told him his case was a most serious one, but, said he, 'God knows, as you say, whether you are innocent or not. I am now going to set you free for a few months, but you must come when called, and unless in the mean time you get some other evidence of your innocence the case will go against you.' Matula thanked the judge, and, much to the chagrin of his enemies, went out of the court free until the judge should return again.

When he returned to Mongo, his wives and sisters, worn with weeping for him, having given him up for dead, were delighted

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to see him ; but the sad looks returned, when he told them he would have to go back again to Tumba, and he saw no way by which he could make his evidence stronger. His prosecutors, however, could not understand the postponement ; they began to fear that he was going to slip out of their hands after all. They were not content to leave it in the hands of the State, so they commenced to harass and worry him again. They sent one messenger after another to see if he were in the town, but they were too afraid to go near him, believing that he was actually in league with evil spirits. They, however, determined to form a strong company and go and catch him. A friend told him these people were coming in two days' time.

Poor Matula ! Sick and tired of thus being hounded about, he knew that God was with him, yet he craved for a human hand to help him in this time of distress. But where was he to turn ? Ponde had no influence to really assist him, and he felt that to go to him would only get him into more trouble with his own people. It was indeed an hour to test his faith in God. By turning completely round, giving up his Christianity, and distributing his property amongst his accusers, his life would be spared. Should he do so ?

CHAPTER X

EXODUS

THE temptation was a very real one. Unless he made friends of his enemies, there seemed, humanly speaking, no hope of his being able to escape. He had but two days to decide. How earnestly he thought and prayed about the matter! Then there came to him as by revelation, 'What about the missionaries?' At the thought he danced for joy. How was it he had not thought of it before? To us it does seem strange, and must be classed amongst those unaccountable lapses which occur in almost every life. No sooner, however, did the thought come than he determined to act upon it. He told Mankwenia to go on ahead, and let Mr. Bentley know that he was coming with as many of his people as he could get to join him. Then he went round to his closest relatives, and told them of his decision to go over and build at Ngombe. His two wives at once consented, and the most of his family circle, but others

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preferred to stay at home to going into a strange country.

Packing was hastily done, and preparing food for the journey, and they were ready to start on the eve of the day when his enemies were coming to catch him. At dark they started, a small company of thirty-seven all told—the poor old mother of nearly sixty, and the young babe a few months old. There were those with bad ulcered legs, one lame, and one who had not walked for weeks. What a motley crowd, to be sure! How they ever traversed that sixty miles without mishap or injury is a mystery. Surely God was with them! They travelled all that first night, and at morn they rested near the railway.

While breakfasting, the cry was raised, 'Soldiers!' The women dashed into the long grass, and the men looked scared. However, it was a needless alarm, as only one soldier was passing, who did not know them, so he gave them 'Good morning,' and passed on. They then walked along the railway a little way, and met some white men, who inquired where they were going, and they at once replied to their friends at Ngombe. 'Oui, oui, à Monsieur Bentley,' replied the white men, and passed on. Then they had a weary journey up hill and down dale, through marshes and swamps, as best they could, until at last they reached Kinkete, the place at which Matula had to pay

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tax in 1891. There they rested for a time. The natives of that town pressed Matula to build with them, and refunded him the unjust tax they had claimed. But as there were no Christians there, Matula, who could not feel safe with any others, declined. Still, one or two stayed there for a time.

About an hour from Kinkete, Selulundi—one of the most remarkable and upright chiefs of the neighbourhood—lives; he knew Matula well, and tried to persuade him to build with him. But Matula was very anxious to be with the white man, leaving, however, those that were weak with Selulundi; he and the others journeyed on to Ngombe, some four hours further. Matula was not disappointed in the welcome he and his received. He felt sure at once that, as far as human help could avail, the missionary would do his best for him. So he looked out for a site, and began to build his home.

A few days afterwards Matula returned for the part of his large family which he had left behind to rest. He found that one of his sisters had given birth to a child, which is now a bright little girlie, able to trot about the station. To his surprise, he met nine of his brethren, who had not been in Mongo when he left, but who, when they heard where he had gone, determined to follow and build with him. It was a great stimulus, and showed how his brethren trusted him.

The next day they all started for Ngombe,



POOL IN WHICH MATULA WAS BAPTIZED.
 MATULA AND HIS PEOPLE.
 GROUP OF NATIVE TEACHERS.

Exodus

and in the evening they arrived, feeling they had found a place of peace and quietness where they would be undisturbed from any pursuing natives. It was indeed a great joy to us to welcome such a large number to the little village, Vianga-Vianga (called after Tom Comber), which is being built just outside our grounds. We were all the more pleased, as we are desirous that the village should consist of others rather than old station hands simply, and so bring new life and activity into what might possibly become a clique and a hindrance rather than a help.

But it was a brave thing that Matula had done. He had received a call, as distinctly as Abraham of old, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house.' And is it too much to say he acted upon it as implicitly as did the patriarch of old? It was not a little matter to so place his entire confidence in the missionary, whom he had been taught to believe was an enemy of his race. Is it said he may have thought it to be the lesser of two evils? But could he? No, for had he remained at Mongo, he himself only would have been murdered; but now he shows his faith in God by placing himself and all his dearest in the hands of God's servants. It was a pure, simple, honest faith, for which God has abundantly blessed him.

They came to us towards the end of the

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wet season, a bad time to begin planting, but an excellent time to arrange for building. They all gave themselves with zest to the work of building a new town, the women during the rains which remained digging and planting the manioc root, and the men cutting sticks and grass for building purposes.

It was a very busy time, and we did our best for them, by permitting them to purchase from our daily stock of native food, when they could not conveniently get it from natives. It was not too busy for them, however, to stay away from prayers, which they daily attended, and to us it was an increasing inspiration to have this company of over forty in daily attendance. It was a joyous thing to see them becoming more and more attentive, and as the months rolled by to see one after another come out very definitely on the Lord's side. But I am running ahead. Their houses were all put up and gardens prepared for planting by the middle of August—a record time for Congo natives.

During these months, Matula worked on with surprising restfulness and cheerfulness. The women-folk would occasionally break out into weeping, as they thought that Matula would have to go back again to Tumba to face the judge and his accusers. There still seemed no way by which he could strengthen his evidence to prove his innocence, while we, of course, could only

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speak of his character in so far as we knew it. But Matula himself did not become despondent. He had sure tokens of God's help and blessing, and being innocent, he still had the faith to believe God would manifest his innocence. In this confidence was his repose.

CHAPTER XI

REVISITING HIS PEOPLE

FROM the time Matula came to Ngombe, he did his best to make his people happy and comfortable, and, as we have seen, they had got nicely settled by the middle of August. Then his thoughts turned from those that were safe to those that were not. How long he himself would be spared, he knew not; any week he might be sent for to Tumba, and there seemed to be only one outcome. This, however, he knew well—that if he were hung, his enemies would plunder all his goods which he had left behind at Mongo, and secretly sell into slavery his nearest relatives.

Yearning thus for their bodily safety, but more especially for their spiritual, he determined to return again to the place of his trials, and make one more endeavour to save his people. When it became known that he was going back again to Mongo, his friends did their best to dissuade him,

Revisiting his People

and his poor old mother clung to him and begged him, with tears, not to run the risk again. To them it seemed he was going back to certain death. But, like Paul, he would not be persuaded to turn aside.

Two of his brothers accompanied him, and, after two days' good travelling, they got in on the evening of the third day. They quietly entered the house of a friend. In the morning, when he went out, his relatives, who had never thought they would see him again, were very delighted and ran about, shouting, 'Matula has returned;' but he warned them not to make too much noise. He then told them why he had come, and begged of them to leave everything and go along to hear the *nsangu zambote* (good news) at the station. 'No, no,' they answered, 'not we; we are living here in the plenty which *yeno nu zowa* (you fools) ran away and left. There are plenty of gardens and goats and sheep and fowls; we are not going, not we.'

He pleaded with them, and warned them that if he were killed they would probably be sold into slavery. But, like Lot's sons, they laughed him to scorn. Native-like, they thought but of the day, and in a most literal fashion they obeyed the injunction of our Lord, 'Be not therefore anxious for the morrow. . . . Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' The natives do not trouble

Matula

their heads about the interpretation of 'anxious,' as meaning 'over-anxious' or 'worried;' it is all the same to them whether the anxiety is 'over' or 'under,' they will have none of it, and are content to let each day look after itself as best it may. Happy carelessness! which, however, reaps its own reward.

Matula was not long there, however, before it got noised abroad; then the people came to see him, and upbraided him with having sold them all to the white men at Ngombe. As Mr. Bentley happened to be over in the district at that time, they were afraid to touch him. But Matula felt he had to act quickly; he desired to take a few of the sheep with him, but could find only nine, the others had been stolen, and sold in different directions. He asked one of his brothers to lead these on ahead, which when his enemies heard they went on in front, and set fire to the tall grass in a specially confined place.

The sheep seemed to lose their heads and ran about the fire, yet one only got burned to death, while the others were badly singed. It occasionally happens, though not often, that people lose their lives in these fires. In 1901 I heard of a woman and her child being burned alive. But, no doubt, the enforced wide roads of the State have done much to prevent any such calamity in future.

Revisiting his People

It was clear to all now that the enemies of Matula were quite as active as ever. Then Matula called his people together again, and pleaded with them not to stay behind. After much discussion a vote was taken, and many of those who but a few days ago 'would not go, not they,' now voted warmly in favour of getting out of the country which was so unfavourable to them. Happy changeableness! influenced only by the motive that seems strongest at the moment. Soon after a party of them started, but Matula and his two companions remained behind.

He was anxious to have another talk with the people who had been hounding him, and attempt to make them his friends, for he had learned to love even his enemies. A hard lesson for even the most advanced Christian. He went over to see Ponde and ask his advice. There he found the work progressing rapidly; the people of Makuta had given themselves with a will to learning. It cheered him to see the good that was being done, and he longed all the more that the people of his town should also desire to know these things.

In talking the matter over with Ponde, he agreed to go back with him, and they would do their best to get one or two boys to accompany Matula from Mongo, to be taught on the station. Thus they showed

Matula

their zeal in trying to save these people. Readers may form their own opinion as to whether it was according to knowledge or not.

They returned to Mongo, full of love for the people and a most sincere desire to benefit them. Friends and enemies gathered together to welcome Ponde; then they had a fine talk with them of God's love in caring for us, and in sending His Son Jesus to show that love by dying for us and bearing our sin on His own body, and thus through Him the vilest sinner might be saved. Matula told them with tears in his eyes, how he himself now believed, and of all the 'good news' which he had heard at Ngombe. He told them that now he had no bitterness in his heart against them, and freely forgave them for the way they had treated him. He earnestly pleaded with them to forsake their evil ways and turn to God. He spoke of how the people at Makuta were progressing in knowledge, and they were getting much *ngangu* (wisdom), and that it would be a good thing if they also sent some boys to the station, who would come back to them like Ponde, and teach them. They listened most eagerly and showed the greatest attention. Matula felt sure they were relenting. They talked apparently freely afterwards, and promised earnestly to send a boy or two who would go back with Matula.

Revisiting his People

That evening Ponde left, feeling well pleased with his visit; but surely had he known what was in store for his friend, he would have waited until Matula had left for Ngombe.

CHAPTER XII

TREACHERY

THE morning after Ponde left, some of the natives came to Matula, asking him when he thought of returning to Ngombe, and he told them the following day. They then asked him to come to the Mbanza (the chief hamlet) of Mongo that afternoon, as they had arranged to send four boys with him. Two were ready, but the other two would follow on. How glad Matula was! In his simplicity he really thought they were going to change. How he thanked God for this good token!

That afternoon he went up with his two companions. On entering the chief's compound they were surprised to see a large company armed with guns and knives and sticks. He felt he had been betrayed, yet he sat down among them as unmoved as possible, and began chatting with them. They asked him several questions about the white man, and the white man's God. As he answered and told them over again about God's love for them, and how that he himself loved them, there arose a great deal of murmuring. They could not understand an

Treachery

unselfish love. 'Yes,' said some; 'that is why our people are dying; Matula sells them all to the white man, who spirits them away in some way only known to himself.' 'We must get rid of him,' said others. 'Let us take him down to the water, and there murder him,' said one. 'No; there are witches there, and he might escape,' replied another. All this was said among themselves; then one bold spirit said, 'Well, Matula, all this is very good that you have told us, and we want to learn too, so we have two boys up the river, let us come along and get them.'

All heartily seconded this proposal, and Matula and his companions started off with them. They passed through a wood to a lone house, where they rested and called for the boys; they called again and again, and went off to fetch them, but it was only a ruse, no boys appeared.

In the mean time Matula and his two friends sat down under the eave of the house, and pulled out their *Mivelo a Zayi* and began to read. This, however, made the onlookers savage; here were the books in which all their names were written, and Matula had sold them all.

One fellow jumped up and hit Matula on the head; he rose to his feet, but could not ward off the knife with which another one stabbed him on the forehead. The blood spurted out, streaming down his face.

Matula

His two friends ran off, calling out, 'Matula is murdered!' The others now stripped him naked and bound him with cords, putting a forked stick round his neck, and led him along in this shameful condition.

At first he could hardly stand, and the blood almost blinded him. 'Ah,' said he, 'God forgive you; why do you want to kill me? I am going to die, but I am not afraid; if you kill me, you will see much suffering; some of you will not be permitted to bury your own mothers' (considered to be one of the greatest calamities that could happen). They only replied, 'You have killed and eaten ever so many; think of all those whose deaths you have caused; why should you live? such an *umpumbulu* is not fit to live.' 'But,' said he, 'you charge me with killing Luvuma, Nzevo, and Mundele, my mother, yet these are alive and well at Ngombe; the others are dead, I know, but only by God's will.'

They would not hear any more; they half led, half dragged him down to a small river, and there he begged them piteously to kill him. In crossing the water he stumbled over a stone; they tied another stick to his neck and dragged him up on the other side. They then led him to another town, where the chief, an old friend, pretended to complain of their bringing him there in that shameful condition. Matula begged for a piece of cloth to cover himself, but the man

Treachery

had no mercy. 'No, no,' said he; 'take him away. Don't kill him here; I don't want to see blood.'

His cries and entreaties to be murdered there and then were of no avail. Others came and helped to drag him down into a deep valley, and there they tied him to a tree. Some ran off to fetch a chief, and others interested, to sanction his murder. Two chiefs and four men were left round a little fire which they had kindled. To these Matula tried to speak and to warn in his feebleness. He told them, 'Now I am dying; but I am not afraid. I rejoice; for when I die I go to God. You cannot kill me if God does not allow you.' He prayed them to repent. 'Let us have some drink,' said they, in reply. One had carried a large calabash of *malavu*, and round this they sat, doing their best to make themselves drunk, while Matula, weak and suffering, looked on in pity. What a picture! How one is reminded of the suffering of our blessed Saviour! Thank God, there are still those willing to suffer for His name.

The messengers soon after returned, but they could not find those most closely interested in this case. What was to be done? One suggested selling, others said, 'No; that will only bring us more trouble later on.' 'We had better kill him.' 'Let us take him to Mfumu (chief) Kwenkezi, and there kill him.' To this they all agreed.

Matula

As they were going along, some of his old friends came taunting him. From one he begged a piece of cloth. 'Not I,' said he, 'I am going to buy you.' Crossing over another stream he could go no further, and lay down and begged them with tears to kill him ; for, said he, 'The angels are waiting to carry my spirit to heaven.' This angered them the more. Then these villains beat and lashed him with sticks and ropes. 'Have mercy, mercy ! kill me with a gun !' cried he. But that was not their intention then ; they wanted to play with him as the cat does with the mouse. They dragged him still on over a very rough road, the blood was oozing out of many parts of his body, but these inhuman wretches had no pity.

When they got to the next town they called a native who had been secretly instructed to murder him to come and do his foul work. He came along sharpening a huge knife. He held out his hand to Matula and gave him *kiambote* (good-bye). Then this rough, heartless fellow raised the knife, and as it brandished in the air to do its work, some one held the arm, saying, 'Mfumu Kwenkezi is not here, and he must be present.' There was more consultation. Then they led him on to Kwenkezi, who was surprised to see him at that late hour, as the sun had long set. He gave them all quite a feast ; but Matula could hardly eat anything. Then they tied Matula in a

Treachery

house. He was laid on his back with arms and legs outstretched, each tied to opposite walls; round his waist were ropes which were tied to watchers on either side, and the forked stick at his neck was fastened to the low ridge-pole. Poor fellow! how he prayed to God for help, that He would look upon him in his misery, and deliver him either by a speedy death, or in some other way.

It was a long, sleepless night, but the dawn at last came. No assistance was at hand, yet his faith in God wavered not. A man soon after came from Makuta warning them to be careful, as the news had got out, and if the State heard of it they might expect trouble. But they heeded not. They did, however, loosen the irons which bound his legs, and loosed the cords a little, then led him to the village where the palaver was to be talked. He begged that the chief there might give him a little cloth, which he did by cutting his own in two. There he talked again of the evil they were doing, and he felt sure if he were killed they would be sorely punished, if not now, hereafter. But it was without avail.

That night they tied him again as before, and in the morning a great palaver was called. The old charges of sorcery were brought up, he had got in touch with the missionary, had given him a boy, and now he himself and his people had gone off to Ngombe, and were beginning to follow God

Matula

and this 'new teaching.' It was clear he was a witch, and surely it is right to kill witches. The great chief who presided called for a vote, and every vote was given against Matula. They decided that an executioner should be sent for to dispatch Matula on the morrow, and his body would be thrown into the River Kwilu. Not a voice, even ever so feeble, was heard to protest against this outrageous deed.

That evening the women saw a stranger in the wood preparing long strings, and wondered. It was the paid murderer arranging his cords with which to tie Matula for the night, so as to ensure his safety for the coming morn. At night Matula was laid down, his feet bound together to iron clogs, his arms were tied together under his head, and the forked stick was fastened again to the low ridge-pole, and his waist was bound as before to natives on either side. He was surrounded by six natives.

Thus began what he believed to be the last night of his life. On his left slept the murderer who had been summoned and heavily bribed to commit this dastardly murder. Native law had in every way been complied with, and to the native mind there was not the slightest hope of escape. It was with less hope that he cried that night to God for deliverance, for on the morrow, unless a miracle was wrought, he must die.



KENTO, MATULA'S WIFE, AND HIS TWO CHILDREN.

CHAPTER XIII

ESCAPE

IN September, 1897, I was journeying over to Tumba on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Graham, who had come from San Salvador to fill Mr. Pople's place (*pro tem.*). Nearing Tumba, we were surprised to see the two companions who had accompanied Matula coming towards us in great haste. We saw by their faces some dread thing had happened, and before we could put any question they blurted out, 'Matula is murdered!' and the tears stood in their eyes. 'Surely not,' said I; 'there must be some mistake.' 'No, no,' they said; 'we saw him beaten and stabbed with a knife; there is no mistake.' 'All right,' I said. 'Mr. Bentley has now got back; go quickly and tell him.'

It was necessary that he should inform the State, for we held ourselves responsible for Matula's appearance at Tumba when required. They ran on, hardly waiting to hear me, and we passed on our way, very sad and dejected. The boys could not say a word, for we had all got to love Matula; his

Matula

quiet, gentle demeanour was such a contrast to the ordinary native. When we arrived at Tumba it was about the first thing we spoke of, for the men had also called on Mr. Graham. Both he and Mrs. Graham felt it quite as keenly as I did, for though they had only seen him two or three times they were very much struck with him, and were surprised to hear he had not yet been received into church fellowship.

A day or two afterwards the letter came from Mr. Bentley for the commissioner which Mr. Graham had to present. He was just about to start off with it when the strange news came that Matula had escaped. We questioned the lad who brought the news, but he could only say he heard from some passers-by who came over from Makuta district. We could not at first believe it; it seemed too strange in these prosaic days, when we try to convince ourselves that the day of miracles is past.

Shortly afterwards we saw some of those who had seen Matula, and who had helped to tie him up—though we did not know it then—and from these Mr. Graham carefully inquired into all the facts of the case. We were still afraid that these people had spread the report of his escape, so as to hide their own murder of him. But we were not long kept in suspense, for, an hour or two afterwards, Ponde appeared, and he confirmed the rumour by saying he himself had seen

Escape

Matula, for when he escaped he at once found his way to Makuta. He had left Matula behind, as he was too weak to walk far.

I had to leave that day with my little caravan, but it was with hearts full of thanksgiving to God that He had manifested His power and spared the life of our friend. We spent ten days more on the road visiting some towns in my district some forty miles east of Tumba, and then returned to Ngombe. My colleagues were expecting to see Matula any day, and the most of his people were going out to meet him at Kimpete.

Some few days after they returned, with Matula at their head, in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Graham, who came to pay us a visit at Ngombe. Poor fellow, how worn-out he looked! He said he waited so long before coming, as he was ashamed to let us see how thin he was. His people were delirious with joy, and our boys and girls could hardly have felt it more had it been a white man. Some time afterwards he gave us an account of his capture and being carried from town to town for two days and nights, which account has appeared in the previous chapter.

There we left him on that third night, bound hand and foot, looking forward to the coming dawn without any hope of human assistance, and that in the morning he must

Matula

die. When Matula felt all earthly hope was gone, he earnestly committed himself to God's keeping, prayed for deliverance, if it were His will, but if not that he might get refreshing sleep. All his six watchers had fallen asleep, and he himself began to doze off. Gradually he was awakened by a queer sensation at his feet. What could it be? Why, they were being burned. Then the truth flashed upon him; his feet were bound over the ashes of last night's fire.

Like the old Druidical fires, those in Congo are practically never extinguished; with a little tow or dry grass and a little wind, a flame can be got almost any time. Cords of any towy substance will gradually smoulder until they are severed. So it was with the cords which bound Matula's feet, they smouldered themselves asunder. What a feeling of freedom! Still his waist, hands, and neck were bound; but with the leverage of being able to draw up his feet he was able to move his hands a little, and by constant friction the cord slipped off the forked stick, then he was able to get his hands in front of him. These he soon got free. But he must go softly, the sleeping watchers were turning. Were they awake? He raised himself a little, and called to them to tie him up again. Whether or no they were really asleep or afraid he does not know; at any rate, they did not answer.

Quietly he wriggled himself out from the

Escape

cords which bound his waist. Then he was free save for the clogs of iron which hung to each foot. Very stealthily he got to the door, which he opened most quietly, and let himself out. Ah, that night air, how refreshing it was! He looked about for something to knock off the irons; he found a hatchet and a large knife, with these he easily released himself. Then, as hard as he could go, anywhere to get away from that house. He tried to find the track to Tumba, but he could not remember where he was and what was its direction, or even the direction of Makuta.

He went on, on the first track that appeared, but that was leading him to a *madioca* (cassava) garden, where he saw fires and heard voices. The natives were out to frighten the elephants, which do a great deal of damage in some parts to the gardens. He had to skirt this garden, otherwise he might be captured again, but all that was before him was a large elephant track, and there he saw a mother elephant and its little one. This would not do, so hurriedly rushing from there, he found a little track which he followed, and it led him down to the Kwilu (a river); and then, as he stood on its brink, he heard the noises of the crocodiles underneath, and as he remembered how many he knew had been eaten by these river monsters he shuddered and turned back. What was he to do? To go further

Matula

back was to be captured, for no doubt his captors had already missed him, and were in search of him ; to go along the elephant track was to leave himself to the mercy of the elephants ; to go into the river, to the crocodiles ; and to stay where he was alone by night was probably to be attacked by a buffalo. He was in a hard plight. Every way death seemed to stare him in the face. Earnestly he prayed to God that as He had delivered him out of the hands of his enemies He would now make his way clear before him.

As he prayed, the answer came. 'It is better to fall into the hands of God than into those of evil men ; the beasts only do the will of their Maker, and they are more harmless than evil men.' So he committed himself again to God, and went down and plunged into the cool stream, and swam harmlessly over to the other side. The river refreshed him greatly, and he stayed a little to wash away the clots of blood which had gathered all over his body. As he bathed, an antelope and her little one came to look on ; it went and returned several times. It was as a promise from God of peace, this most gentle animal's visit.

He ascended on the other side, and knowing better now his whereabouts, he pursued his journey, keeping carefully away from any town. Soon the dawn came, and he needed to be more careful. As any

Escape

traveller came along, Matula hid in the grass. Several times he inquired the way to Makuta, but those he met were too frightened to reply.

As the morning wore on there were many more travellers, all of whom were going on to the great market of the district. He saw one party coming along, and he hid in the wood. Peering through the branches, he saw two of Ponde's boys leading a goat. When he called to them they were very frightened, having heard that he was dead, but they stopped to listen, and told him Ponde was at home. Much cheered, he went on up to Makuta, and went straight for the prayer-house, where he expected Ponde to be. He opened the door, calling out, '*E makangu Ponde*' ('Friend Ponde'), but a little boy rushed out terribly frightened, and ran to Ponde, saying, 'Matula's ghost has come!'

Ponde went off to see, and to his great joy and surprise there was Matula in the flesh. They embraced one another for very joy—anything but a Congo habit. Then hot water was sent for, and medicine to bathe and dress his many wounds. Then poor Matula, after all the excitement and feeling of joy of having a friend near him, threw himself down on a mat, and soon passed into a happy, peaceful slumber.

For several days he stayed indoors, tended and cared for by Ponde as an only child might be nursed by its mother.

Matula

Though it soon got out that Matula had escaped, his pursuers were too much afraid to attempt capturing him again. They looked forward for the State to do the work successfully which they had only bungled. Matula looked forward also to his trial, yet with a little more hope and confidence than he had before, for he had a very marked token of God's power exercised on his behalf.

CHAPTER XIV

TRIAL AT TUMBA

NOT long after the return of Matula to Ngombe, Mr. Graham wrote to Mr. Cameron (Mr. Bentley in the mean time had left for England), asking that he might send down Matula to Tumba to meet the judge, who was expected there in three or four days' time. He also wrote, saying there would be necessity for much earnest prayer on Matula's behalf, as his enemies had prepared their case with all care, whereas Matula could not, from the nature of the charge, have any witnesses, save those who might bear testimony to the gentleness of his character. The commissioner at the time said the case was very much against him, and, unless he could prove himself innocent, he would certainly be hung as a warning to other evil-doers.

Matula went fearlessly to Tumba, strong in his own innocence ; though he saw no way out, yet he felt sure God was with him. We at Ngombe daily at public service committed him to the tender all-wise care

Matula

of our Heavenly Father, that He would justify the innocent, for innocent we felt sure he was.

When Matula arrived at Tumba, he was much surprised to find some of his old accusers there in chains. The State had heard of their attempt to murder him, and at once the commissioner despatched a sergeant and some soldiers to bring in the culprits. The soldiers arrived at Mongo when the people had gathered to bury the chief's mother, who had lain unburied for months. Several pigs had been killed, and many pieces of cloth gathered together; these the soldiers seized, and the men they captured and carried to Tumba. There, however, they still maintained their old charge against Matula, and that they had only tied him up to ensure his appearance in due time. In reality, they were mightily afraid of the soldiers, and remembered Matula's warning that punishment would follow their foul deeds.

What followed at Tumba can be very much better described by Mr. Graham (of San Salvador), from whom I received the following account. He was present at the trial, and so speaks of what he himself witnessed.

Referring first of all to the incidents preceding the trial, with most of which the readers are already acquainted, he proceeds:—‘The conclusion of Matula's trial had been delayed so long that it almost

Trial at Tumba

seemed as if the Government had forgotten all about him. Perhaps, indeed, they had, owing to sickness and changes of judges, etc. The arrest of the chief man who tried to murder Matula, however, may have reminded them of the original palaver, for soon after I received an intimation that the judge would try the case on December 9. I therefore had Matula at Tumba on December 8 awaiting his trial. The judge could not come, after all, so Matula had his trouble for nothing. Again we were advised that the judge was coming, and had Matula in readiness, but again the case was postponed, as the judge was ill. This was December 16. On Friday, 17th, I wrote to the judge, telling him that we had twice brought Matula and his witnesses and had to send them away again, and asking him who was to be the defending counsel, and also the date on which we should again bring up Matula and company.

‘On Sunday, December 19, I had a wire from the judge, saying that Monsieur L. was to be Matula’s defender, and that the trial would take place on the following Thursday.

‘On Monday I saw M. L., and explained the whole case to him. I then saw the notes of the former trial, from which it was evident that the translator had utterly misrepresented the case.

‘After reading the evidence as reported

Matula

to the judge, the opinion of M. L. was that, guilty or not guilty, Matula would be hanged, and, indeed, I feared that, unless the Lord would intervene, in all probability there would be a judicial murder. You may well imagine I did not sleep much till the trial was over.

‘That very day I providentially found two witnesses who were with Matula at another place at the time of the supposed murder. I made these men stay almost by force to give evidence, lest the proper witnesses should fail to turn up, and it was well I did so.

‘In the mean time we examined any witnesses we could get hold of, and sent them off for the others, the most important of whom was a woman who had nursed her sister, and the woman who was supposed to have been murdered by Matula in their last sickness, when they both died of small-pox. This, too, had all happened years before the supposed attack by Matula.

‘On Wednesday afternoon the judge and the prosecuting attorney arrived by train from Matadi, but the most important witnesses were delayed by a storm, and did not turn up the following morning until after the trial was over.’

The morning dawned which was to see Matula’s fate decided. In due time those interested gathered round that ordinary-looking large grass house which bore the

Trial at Tumba

grand title of 'Tumba Palais de Justice.' Soon the judge, prosecuting K.C., clerk, defending counsel, interpreter, prisoner and soldiers, witnesses, and Mr. Graham were seen approaching from different quarters, and entered the cool large room in order, Mr. Graham bringing up the rear, having carefully looked around to see if the expected witnesses were at hand. Guards were placed on sentry outside the door. The natives were awe-struck at the ceremony and solemnity with which the judge and counsel seated themselves and prepared for the day's proceedings.

Everything was conducted, as far as possible, as it would have been at Brussels. No greater contrast can be imagined than that between the native 'court of justice' and that of the white man. The former is in the open air, as a rule, the greatest chief present being seated on the ground on a leopard's skin, with sometimes a cloth thrown over his shoulders and a spear in his hand or by his side, and the other chiefs squatting near him, looking as important as they can. Every case requires to be well introduced with *malavu* and heavy bribing, and as often as not it has many times to be postponed, owing to the confusion and quarrelling of the contending parties. Imagine then, if possible, the feelings of those used to such proceedings where every man is his own spokesman, being ushered into the presence

Matula

of the State officials with their sombre caps and gowns and spotless white bands, and almost as white faces, and being questioned and cross-questioned by these. Is it any wonder if the witnesses quaked, trembled, and gave confused and inconsistent answers, as did some of Matula's witnesses on the former occasion?

To resume, then, Mr. Graham's narrative, he says, 'I was only present as a visitor, perhaps I should rather say my position was that of advising attorney to Monsieur L., who was counsel for the defence. The lack of the proper witnesses was a serious drawback; but against that we had the fact that neither had the witnesses on the other side turned up. Some of the points which I had endeavoured to impress upon M. L., in favour of Matula, were the following:—

'There is evidence that a woman from the town of Matente (not Matembe, as stated, as there is no such town) was caught many years ago by Yalala (a friend of Matula's family), in revenge for the people there having caught his son. This woman, named Kinsiona, he sold to Kuba of Kwilu. She subsequently died at Kwilu of small-pox, along with another woman, whose sister nursed them both to the end. These facts could be testified to by the woman who acted as nurse, as well as by others who knew the circumstances, and who were on their way to Tumba.

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‘The capture of this woman, and her death could not have taken place towards the close of 1896, but must have happened before the advent of the Congo railway, that is to say, before the State’s authority was established over the district in question. Those who took part in the quarrel could not be judged by laws which were not then in force. It was a native quarrel, carried on in native fashion.

‘As to Matula himself, he was known to the Rev. W. H. Bentley and other missionaries, both before and since the date of the supposed murder, and they gave a good report of him. And although they know the district well, no rumour of a murder at the time indicated ever reached any of the missionaries.

‘Matula himself denied ever having been to Matente; he also denied having ever killed any one anywhere, or having struck any woman with a stick, as mentioned in the charge against him.

‘The clear evidence goes to show that he had no hand in the quarrel when Kinsiona was taken by Yalala’s party, for he was then trading at another place, and heard of the fight on his return, for which there were two witnesses.

‘The man who as Welo (or better known as Kwenkezi) gave evidence against Matula, was not Welo at all, but his son or slave, Masamba, who swore he was Welo, the

Matula

latter being too much afraid to appear in person, lest his false charge should be discovered, and return upon his own head.

‘In contrast with this, Matula, although free to escape trial, had he desired to do so, had three times appeared on demand, at great inconvenience to himself and family.

‘Lastly, Mafuku—the nephew and heir of Welo—and some other chiefs tried to murder Matula, several weeks ago. Mafuku is now in prison on this very charge. Therefore not Matula, but his enemies and would-be murderers are law-breakers and enemies of the State.’

These facts the counsel for defence worked up into a masterly speech, and so convinced the judge and prosecuting attorney that they decided to take Matula’s own testimony. This Matula gave in a clear, steady, straightforward manner. The judge, in summing up, declared there had been a great deal of false swearing against the prisoner, and rejoiced that the balance of evidence was clearly in his favour. He, therefore, had pleasure in dismissing him with a clear character.

‘On emerging from the court house,’ continues Mr. Graham, ‘we met the belated witnesses for both sides. The prosecuting attorney gave Masamba (Welo’s friend) and Diamoni (Welo’s wife) a sharp lecture, and when his command of the language came to an end, I took up the narrative, and I think

Trial at Tumba

they had a bad quarter of an hour of it. They are likely to think twice before putting their necks in the perjury noose for Welo or any one else.

‘When Matula met his friends, who were dressed in great style and marched up as if they had “bought the street,” his greeting was after this fashion. “Yes, I am free, but no thanks to you; had my hope been in you, and not in God, I might have been hanged!”’

The trial of Mafuku and party, who had endeavoured to murder Matula, was a very short one. They had already been in chains for several months, and Matula did not wish extreme measures to be taken against them; after a sharp reprimand and being bound over to keep the peace in future, they were allowed to depart.

When all this was settled at Tumba, Matula did not stay long; he hurried back as quickly as he could to wife and friends. Never shall I forget that day when he returned to the station. When it was known he was at hand, crowds went out to meet him, guns were fired in his honour, and the people danced for joy. In the thanksgiving service there was quite a thrill of emotion, tears of gladness stood in many eyes, as we felt that God had been very good: truly He, and He alone, was the hearer and answerer of prayer.

Oiten and often has Matula gone back

Matula

to his old town, desiring to show his relatives that he has truly forgiven them.

As may be imagined, his experiences have made him a man of much love and tenderness. He is a true gentleman, and one of the most sincere characters in all Congo. On one occasion, Mr. Pinnock said of him, 'He is the only one-eyed fellow I know in Congo ;' meaning that in all things he has only a single eye for God's glory.

CHAPTER XV

DAYS OF PEACE

IT was in the course of the year 1899 that Matula was received into Church fellowship. His unblemished life, combined with a simple, undying faith in the Lord Jesus, made it impossible for us to keep him out of communion. The coloured race is such an impressionable one that extra care is necessary in the public recognition of any as disciples of the Lord. But Matula had had a long preparation-time through much trial and suffering, yet amidst it all he had been true and loyal, even to the gate of death, to his Master.

It was not long after his baptism that his one remaining wife, Kento, was also baptized after a profession of her faith in the Saviour. She had been a true helpmeet to him in his sufferings, and through them all her faith had not wavered. She was his first wife; he married her in 1889, when she was a young maiden of sixteen or so. According to native custom he had taken two others, but to them he never felt really attached.

Matula

The third one forsook him in the hour of persecution. The second one died shortly after their arrival at Ngombe. She had been very happy with him, for it must be remembered the native women have not the finer feelings nor the enlightenment of the women of Christian countries, and Matula had always been to her a most kind and thoughtful husband. Yet one cannot help feeling that she was mercifully removed, for the soul of the man always cleaves to the first choice.

For years troubled waters had been rolling over them, and it seemed as if they must perish; but now the Lord had led them into a quiet haven by still waters. The feeling that came over every visitor to their little compound was one of peace and quietness. The neat houses, the well-kept gardens, the tidy fences and cleanly swept roads—wherever you went—spoke of a home in which it was a delight to dwell. In the mornings the sounding of the pestle in the mortar pounding the dried cassava root into a flour, the cackling of the hens, and the bleating of the goats, spoke of an industry and work which are so uncommon in the country that make it worth recording.

Then at eventide, in a country where it is a shame for a man to speak to or even acknowledge his wife in public, this simple-hearted, happy, contented couple might be seen walking round Vianga-Vianga, or

Days of Peace

entering the white man's house side by side. Whenever or wherever we met them there was the warm smile, the happy word of greeting and a native politeness, which was a pleasure to see.

I have often wondered whether they had any blood in their veins of a higher type of mankind, for their facial expression and general bearing were totally different to the average Congo native. There is quite a sprinkling—at any rate, in Lower Congo—of natives of such refined manner, small-featured and graceful carriage, that we cannot help feeling that these must be descendants of a nobler ancestry than the ordinary Congolese. So much for speculation.

Matula was richly blessed after having come to live amongst us. He and his wife were most regular at school, and they very soon became able to read and write fairly well. He found much comfort in reading his *Ekangu Diampa*. And he had the joy of seeing some twelve or more of his household received into Church fellowship. Two of his sisters married native evangelists, and were gladdened by having children of their own.

There was one thing, however, which gave both Matula and his wife much joy, yet weighed them down with a great feeling of responsibility. They had only one child spared to them, a bright girl about ten years old; there is also a son of Matula,



LUNENGA, CHIEF OF MONGO.

Days of Peace

But there was one thing above all, over which Matula rejoiced exceedingly, and that is the great change which came over his native town Mongo. Early in 1899 Mr. Cameron was visiting that district, and, to his great surprise and pleasure, the people there begged him to send a teacher who would teach them and show them the way to God. The old chief was succeeded by a young man, earnest to know and follow these new teachings as the people of Makuta had done for years. He was not at home during the time of Matula's persecution, but when he heard of it he was very much ashamed, and afterwards Matula had no truer friend than Lunenga, that young chief. A very earnest and capable young teacher went over, and soon a prayer-house was erected, which at a later date was enlarged; some 60 or 70 attended school regularly, and Lunenga, with several others, was baptized.

In the year 1900 Lunenga accompanied me to the town where he had lived during those years of Matula's sufferings, and through his earnest pleadings and warm presentation of the truth on some previous visits, I found the people earnestly longing to have a teacher, like their friends at Mongo. A young lad was left, the people with a will built a capital house, which was daily filled at prayers, and almost 70 were on the school register. There have been, I am happy to say, not

Matula

a few anxious inquirers. From both Mongo and this new town of Kinsende we hope that many other towns may catch fire, which fire has been lit by the fires of persecution, which were made to surge round the soul of innocent Matula.

CHAPTER XVI

FOREBODINGS

IN the course of 1900 we had many patients suffering from chest and throat diseases, amongst whom was Matula. I was awakened during the night by Nlemvo, who said that Matula was very ill, he feared he was dying. I hurriedly dressed and went to see him; all was quiet when I entered.

Matula was breathing quickly, and wore an anxious, troubled look on his face. At first I thought he was dying. As we stood watching, we were surprised to hear him start singing, '*Landa, landa, Fizu ikunlanda*' (Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus), then he rambled on a bit, 'Oh, kill me now, kill me now with a gun. I want to be free, the angels are waiting for me.' He evidently thought he was in the old fight again. He awoke after a while, and told his wife, who had not slept for two nights, not to cry but to try to sleep. 'Don't cry; I am going to heaven if I die, and you will soon follow me.' Then he turned to those around him, 'If

Matula

I go your father will be gone ; but don't weep for me. You stay here and carry on your work ; you young women, don't marry any one but Christians, and mind you go wherever they go.'

All this was brought out very slowly ; he was indeed very low. His cough was most harassing, and he seemed at times to be almost choked. I waited for two hours by his bedside, administering some soothing medicines, but I had really no hope of his recovery. He lay thus for two or three days, and we fought death, and by God's grace conquered, though I have always thought he was disappointed, as he wanted to go. His convalescence was very slow ; it was the greater part of six weeks before he was well and about again.

Yet from that time he never recovered his old strength, and I began to fear he would not be long spared to his people. Some of those who came with him returned again to Mongo, when the teacher had gone, but several others have been taken away by that dreadful disease, sleep-sickness. Just before he became ill, Mankwenia, the lad whom he had first given to Mr. Bentley, died of it, and his two companions who journeyed with him on that memorable journey to Mongo also became victims to it. His mother died soon after his return from Tumba. All these things weighed very much upon him.

Forebodings

This is a terrible disease, and a most pathetic one. Hundreds, nay, thousands, die of it every year in Congo land. It is thinning out the country at an appalling rate, but what to do with it is a mystery. The matter has been discussed in the *Lancet*, and in the *Medical Journal*, and some patients have died of it at Charing Cross and London Hospitals. It is pitiful, and one sheds tears of sympathy as one hears every now and again that some well-known native Christian has been seized by it. And now to think Matula may have it seems too much.

Would God that some expert at home would hear the cry of need wrung from the poor tottering victims, that something may be done to save them! There may not be much of a name attached to such a mission, though even that would not be wanting, yet the reward would be great. Surely to find out the cause of the death of thousands annually, and the possibility of stopping that fearful death-rate, is a mission worthy of the brightest intellect. It is evidently necessary that the examination should be carried on amid the victims and their surroundings.

One Sunday Matula came to me with his old blanket thrown round him, and not looking at all like himself.

‘What is the matter?’ I asked.

‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I have come to talk to you about myself; you white men are my

Matula

friends, and I want you really to tell me whether I have sleep-sickness or not. You know I have heard rumours that the people are talking about me. Now, I think, as Christians, we ought not to hide anything, and I would much rather they would tell me, so that I might know what to do. I do feel as though there was something the matter with me, as I feel pain all down my legs, and at night I cannot sleep very well. I half doze and dream. Last night I was thinking much of my illness, and it came to me as a dream, for I haven't heard it from any one or read it—that we are just like trees in the forest, they always rise up and up to heaven; they may get cut at the top a little, but they just go on and on until some one comes and cuts them right down to plant other things there, then the roots soon wither, and the branches are burned by-and-by. So we are just like that; we go on growing and flourishing, then we see suffering for a little, and then we go on growing again, until God just comes and cuts down those that are not good to plant others in their place.'

Still Matula kept on talking, as I wondered and thanked God for this one trophy of our work in Congo land.

'I also thought,' he continued, 'I heard the water murmuring and running on, sometimes gently, and sometimes falling over the rocks with a great noise, and it

Forebodings

seemed to say, "I cannot stay here, I must go on;" still from the water, as it passes, you can take up a little to refresh yourself, yet on it goes; so I think I am going quickly. Perhaps God helped me, like the water, to bless some one. I am not afraid, as I go into glory, but if I am taken, what about the roots, my wife and children?'

Then he grew a little despondent, and we sat both silent for a little; I saw there was something else he wanted to say.

'Sometimes now,' he went on, 'when I go to school the children laugh at me, as I am not so quick as they are, and I feel a little *lulendo* (pride) against the teacher, who is only a boy; but I ask God to forgive me, and I try and try all I can to get on, but sometimes the whole hour is spent with one sum. They think I don't want to progress, and that I am weary of it, but it is not so, though the devil does sometimes say, "Don't go back again;" then I ask Jesus for strength, and I go, thinking it will please Him, and yet I know I am getting weaker.'

Poor Matula! the dread of having this sickness seemed to haunt him, a fairly sure sign that it was coming on. I told him we could not yet see sufficient reason to say he had it, but reminded him of the tender care of our loving Father towards him in times past, and that just as his enemies could not kill him neither need this sickness—even supposing he did have it, if it were not

Matula

God's will. We would pray about it and for him very earnestly.

I then reminded him of God's blessing to the man who delighted to do the will of God; he was as a tree planted by rivers of waters, yet our bodies are like the trees which were cut down and burned, or like the grass of the field. 'Oh,' said he, 'do we read about that in the Bible?' Then I turned to Peter, and read him the last few verses of 1 Peter i. 'Let me see it;' I did, and read again from the thirteenth verse to the end. He was delighted with the thought of our having been bought, 'not with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ.' To satisfy him I had to read the whole chapter, and it came to him as a revelation that God had allowed him to pass through all his suffering and sorrow as a trial of his faith. He had thought it was all the work of the devil, but now his face brightened up with a new joy as he felt God had led him through it all. As in the case of Job, the devil was allowed to cause him much suffering, but he could not take his life. Matula felt that all the trial through which he passed was a comparatively little thing in the face of his present knowledge of the love and goodness and power of God.

It was a happy morning's chat. The gloom with which he had entered passed away, his face was beaming with joy as he left the little room. He left it to go back

Forebodings

and live in his own house near to that of his wife, bearing what we feared to be an incurable and contagious disease. He was exceedingly careful lest his wife or children should take it. At Communion Service it was pathetic to see him with his own little glass, in which he had some wine poured out, and he asked his neighbour to help him to a small piece of the bread and place it before him, lest his very touch on the plate would defile it for his neighbour. Simple, true-hearted Matula! There are, alas! too few like thee!

CHAPTER XVII

MATULA'S LAST DAYS

SINCE the foregoing chapters were written, it was with great joy I read the account of the sending out to Uganda of an expert commission to examine into the causes of the dread sleep-sickness. God grant it may be successful, so that the lives of thousands may be spared annually, and a brighter day dawn for Central Africa!

The subject of this little book, to our great grief, fell a victim to the sleep-sickness. This awful malady manifests itself in different victims in different ways. Over some of the naturally lethargic it steals as a narcotic, deadening every sense and feeling, and inducing a dazed and stupid semi-consciousness. Over the lively and active it dominates as the stronger man trying to bind the strong. There is struggle after struggle, and for long it is uncertain which will gain the victory. With these victims, as they feel themselves getting more and more under its power, they rouse themselves



SUFFERERS FROM SLEEP-SICKNESS.

Matula's Last Days

to shake it off; but the mind being weakened, their efforts bear every symptom of insanity. In fact, strong outbursts of passion, ungovernable acts of temper, and various forms of unreasonableness appearing in otherwise gentle characters, are almost always a sure index of the beginnings of sleep-sickness and the efforts of the mind, as it were, to throw it off.

Such victims are, of course, longer in being overcome than the lethargic; especially if they are well nursed and cared for during the incipient stages. The disease may seem at times to be latent in its victims, and then suddenly something rouses their ire and they become practically insane.

Thus it was with Matula. For months we suspected he had the sickness, but it was latent, and his ever-faithful wife nursed him with loving care and gentleness. During that time many of his dear ones died, and the majority of the rest longed to get back to their home at Mongo, where there was now peace and quietness. Much against his will, they went, and he was left alone with his devoted Kento, a sister, and three young children. These things preyed upon his mind, which was already being unhinged by the disease, and he began to beat his tender wife, believing her to be the cause of his sorrows. Then he would break down into fits of weeping and remorse.

At last he became unmanageable, and his

Matula

wife's life was in danger, so we suggested tying him up. At the mention of the chain he ran off without word or warning. Afterwards we heard he had gone back to his old home, having travelled night and day. Shortly afterwards his wife and sister followed to nurse him there. He only lived about two months longer, and most of the time he was not responsible for his actions. But at sane moments he clearly showed his trust was placed in Him in whom he had believed for so many years.

From Kento herself I derived the following account of these days. The news of Matula's illness and fits of madness had preceded him to Mongo. When he arrived the people quite expected to see some outbursts of passion, but for a little time he remained very quiet. He rejoiced daily in the large gatherings for morning worship, and the singing of praises to God in the very place where he had suffered so much. But he found that many did not come to prayers who ought to have done so. He then began to go round the hamlets and compel the people to come, and found himself beginning to beat them. He realized his danger, and begged his friends to tie him up, lest he should hurt or perhaps kill some one. It was with great sorrow they tied him somewhat loosely; but as he soon after broke away, they were convinced of the need of making him secure.

Matula's Last Days

So he was once again tied—neck, hands, and feet.

Ah, Matula! Why did God allow this to come upon thee? It is a great mystery; and I cannot explain it, save on the lines of all Christian suffering.

At sane moments he taught the people of God's love, and that they ought not to forsake His house. Once he told his sister he saw Jesus coming for him with a great crowd of angels. He was nearing his end, and his strong constitution had at last given way. He soon became too weak to stand, and his death was only a matter of days. The cords were cut, the stick taken from his neck, and hands and feet were loosened. Then his friends began to watch, as those that watch for the end. The last month or two had made no difference, save to intensify, if that could be, their love and regard for him, who through the path of persecution and severe trial had brought to them life and joy and peace. During those last few days he was conscious only at odd moments, then would he ever put up his hand to heaven, saying, '*Tala*' ('Look'). With eye glistening he looked steadfastly and listened intently, but those around could see or hear nothing. Surely he saw the King in His glory, who was calling him up from this world of sin and suffering to a home of rest and happiness!

The last morn dawned for Matula. It

Matula

ushered in a bright and glorious day over the earth ; and to him it heralded a day that should never fade, the 'everlasting day of Peace.'

Matula has gone. His end has been a mystery ; but his life remains a living influence. At the time when these words are written a candidate for Church fellowship—an aged woman of about sixty—told the messenger it was through Matula she had learned to trust the loving Saviour. She had passed through a time of sore doubt and trial. Some time ago she had begun to take a great interest in spiritual things ; but her only daughter died, and the devil made her believe God was not a God of love, otherwise He could not have deprived her of her only child. So she gave up attending prayers, and mourned in silence the lost one. Matula found her one day weeping sadly, and tried to comfort her. Knowing of her sad loss, he told her the pathetic story of the widow of Nain in the graphic manner natural to a Congo native. How that the poor widow had nursed and watched and wept over her only son in his illness, alternating with hope and fear. At last the dread day came, and he was taken from her. Then she screamed and shrieked, rolled on the ground, beat her head against the roadway, cut herself with stones in the paroxysm of her grief ; but it was of no avail. Quickly the body was tied up by

Matula's Last Days

willing hands and carried towards the grave, and the poor woman followed totteringly, crying out wildly in her agony. Just then there came along One who was full of majesty and gentleness and love, who spake so tenderly, bidding her not to weep, for her son was not dead, but sleeping. Wonderingly she looked as this kind Stranger touched the bier, and immediately her son was restored to life again. Could it be? O wondrous love! O rapturous joy! her boy restored to her again!

‘Thus,’ said Matula, ‘I cannot tell you your child will come back again; but Jesus is the same, loving and tender, as He ever was. He has taken your child, and is keeping her for you. Do not weep. Trust in Him, and you will meet your daughter again.’

‘Since that time,’ says this aged convert, ‘my tears have all gone. I have trusted the Saviour, and never doubted His love.’ A few weeks ago Mr. Frame had the great joy of baptizing her in her own town.

Just as the sleep-sickness was passing into madness Matula spoke at the Church meeting, having a presentiment his end was near. He pleaded with the Christians to deal tenderly with the sick and afflicted, especially the sleep-sick, who were, as it were, under sentence of death. To tend and help them in practical ways, remembering what

Matula

they did was being done for the Master's sake, and He would reward them; but if we spurned the sick and had no mercy, how could we hope for mercy by-and-by? 'Hell,' said he, 'is not a place prepared for bad people, but a place which people prepare for themselves, and'—with all reverence he said it—'carry their own firewood in their evil actions to feed the fires of their own torment'—an echo, no doubt, of what he had heard from some missionary; but it had taken hold of him and the truth involved. Thine was a gentle, Christlike soul, Matula! On earth we shall never meet thee more; but we shall meet again, when the morning dawns and the shadows flee away.

Matula has gone into the eternal light of heaven. But have not the angels of God already rejoiced over this one jewel dug out of Congo's dark mine? and consider the love given, the labour spent, the sacrifice shown, and the tears shed, of the many who have had part in the furtherance of the work in Congo land, a small price to have been paid for the trophy of this one soul, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. And yet he is but one—I grant, a noble one—among many.

We thank God for the mighty throng which is gathering from Congo land to swell the company of the ransomed in that grand song of victory, 'Unto Him who

Matula's Last Days

hath loved us; . . . unto Him who hath conquered; . . . unto Him who hath given power over death and hell and darkness; to Him be glory for evermore. Amen.'

THE END.



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